

Date: 12 May 2020
Our ref: 314495
Your ref: 18/00825/HYBRID



Cherwell District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
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Crewe
Cheshire
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T 0300 060 3900

Dear Sir,

Planning consultation: Hybrid - mixed use development including 1,175 new dwellings, 60 close care dwellings, retail & employment space including a new medical centre, new school, creation of areas of open space etc

Location: Heyford Park, Camp Road, Upper Heyford, Bicester OX25 5HD

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 15 April 2020 which was received by Natural England on the same day.

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 advice on other natural environment issues is set out below.

Ardley Cutting and Quarry 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. We note that an air quality assessment has been undertaken which demonstrates that there will not be a significant impact on the SSSI in terms of nitrogen deposition arising from traffic generated by the proposals. We advise that a requirement for further air quality assessment is included at reserved matters stage, should the proposed energy facility use technology that could give rise to air pollution. We advise that an appropriate planning condition or obligation is attached to any planning permission to secure these measures.

Other Advice

Upper Heyford Airfield Local Wildlife Site

We would expect the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to assess and consider the other possible impacts resulting from this proposal on local sites and priority habitats and species when determining this application.

Natural England does not hold locally specific information relating to the above. These remain material considerations in the determination of this planning application and we recommend that you seek further information from the appropriate bodies, including the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), in order to ensure the LPA has sufficient information to fully understand the impact of the proposal before it determines the application. A more comprehensive list of local groups can be found at [Wildlife and Countryside link](#).

The Upper Heyford Airfield Local Wildlife Site contains, amongst other habitats, species rich lowland calcareous grassland (a priority habitat) 7.5ha of which would be lost as a result of this development. It is proposed that this loss is compensated for through habitat creation; compensation proposals should be subject to the highest scrutiny. Their viability is likely to be reliant on long-term monitoring and management, and when considering proposals involving compensation, it is important to recognise that some habitats are almost impossible to create in the short term – this should be reflected in the decision to support proposals involving compensation and the scale of the compensation proposed.

Where habitats are created as mitigation or enhancement for a development, the proposals must include sufficient detail. This should be underpinned by robust science and evidence to ensure that the habitats and species they support meet, and are maintained at, the required quality. Natural England recommends that a management plan and monitoring programme should be produced for all habitats subject to creation or restoration as part of the mitigation for the impacts of this application and, should the local planning authority be minded to grant permission for this application, such a strategy is secured through an appropriately worded condition. In addition, funding should be secured for the implementation of the management plan in perpetuity. A Section 106 agreement may be the most appropriate means of securing this.

The creation of the compensatory habitat to the west of the airfield misses the opportunity to enhance habitat connectivity between Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI and the Upper Heyford Airfield Local Wildlife Site; we advise that, if compensatory habitat were to be provided on arable land to the east of the airfield, this would be likely to achieve greater gains for biodiversity through improved habitat connectivity.

Further general advice on the consideration of protected species and other natural environment issues is provided at Annex A.

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on by return email.

Yours sincerely,

Eleanor Sweet-Escott
Lead Adviser – Sustainable Development
Thames Solent Team

Annex A – additional advice

Natural England offers the following additional advice:

Landscape

Paragraph 170 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 in order to respect 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 the requirements of the NPPF. This is the case regardless of whether the proposed development is sufficiently large to consult Natural England. Further information is contained in Natural England's [Technical Information Note 049](#).

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. 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 SSSI 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 paragraph 174 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 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 [here](#)². 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>

² <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

Ancient woodland and veteran trees

You should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and veteran trees in line with paragraph 175 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 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/veteran trees where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

Environmental enhancement

Development provides opportunities to secure a net gain for nature and local communities, as outlined in paragraphs 8, 32 and 170 of the NPPF. We advise you to follow the mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 175 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 may wish to consider off site measures, including sites for biodiversity offsetting. Opportunities for enhancement might include:

- Providing a new footpath through the new development to link into existing rights of way.
- 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.

You could also consider how the proposed development can contribute to the wider environment and help implement elements of any Landscape, Green Infrastructure or Biodiversity Strategy in place in your area. For example:

- Links to existing greenspace and/or opportunities to enhance and improve access.
- Identifying opportunities for new greenspace and managing existing (and new) public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips)
- Planting additional street trees.
- Identifying any improvements to the existing public right of way network or using the opportunity of new development to extend the network to create missing links.
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. coppicing a prominent hedge that is in poor condition or clearing away an eyesore).

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 other green networks and, where appropriate, urban fringe areas should also be explored to help promote the creation of wider green infrastructure. Relevant aspects of local authority green infrastructure strategies should be delivered where appropriate.

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

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF highlights 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](#).