

Date: 07 May 2024
Our ref: 470475
Your ref: F/24/96888



David Huckfield
Eastleigh Borough Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

Customer Services
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Dear David,

Planning consultation: Conversion of first floor area of church meeting facility to a two-bedroom self-contained flat with associated elevational alterations and extension to existing access ramp

Location: 70 Station Road, Netley Abbey, Southampton, SO31 5AF

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 19 March 2024 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

OBJECTION

Natural England objects to this proposal.

As submitted we consider it will have an adverse effect on the integrity of New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site.

There is a significant level of uncertainty as to the effectiveness of the proposed in-borough measures to address recreational impacts on the New Forest. We advise it would not be currently possible to conclude no adverse effects on the integrity of the New Forest designated sites.

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

Recreational impacts on the New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar

It is noted the applicant proposes to provide a financial contribution towards Eastleigh Borough Council's Interim Mitigation Strategy to address recreational impacts on the New Forest designated sites. Natural England understands this strategy was approved at a

cabinet committee meeting in March 2022, to last for 5 years up to March 2027, while cross-boundary partnership work with other affected local authorities and Natural England progresses the development of a longer term, strategic, proportionate, and co-ordinated approach to suitably address the impacts from planned growth across the area.

Natural England have serious concerns with various elements of the interim strategy, including the reduced provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), the lack of information on increasing visitor capacity at the Itchen Valley Country Park and lack of an accompanying monitoring strategy. This leads to a significant level of uncertainty remaining as to the effectiveness of the proposed in-borough measures. Additionally, we have concerns that the approach will harm ancient woodland at the proposed SANG site east of Allington Lane due to pressure from increased access.

We do not consider the approved Interim strategy is precautionary enough. We advise that further information is provided that demonstrates the effectiveness of providing SANG at a 2ha/1000 people standard, an assessment of current visitor levels/increased capacity at Itchen Valley Country Park (IVCP) and agreed measures, and an accompanying monitoring strategy. Without this information, we advise it is not currently possible to conclude no adverse effects on the integrity of the New Forest designated sites.

Additionally, information on how impacts on ancient woodland from increased access will be avoided and/or mitigated at the proposed SANG site should be provided to demonstrate alignment with requirements in the National Planning Policy Framework regarding irreplaceable habitat and Natural England's [standing advice on ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees](#).

Deterioration of the water environment

Nutrient Budget

Your Authority has undertaken an Appropriate Assessment, informed by a nutrient budget which concludes that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of the Solent and Southampton Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, and the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC). As Competent Authority it is your responsibility to ensure that you are confident that there is sufficient information to support the values used in the calculation, and that the nutrient budget calculation is correct.

Please note the calculation is based on all wastewater from the development being treated at Peel Common WWTWs. If this situation changes, a reassessment of the nutrient calculation will be required and a revised Habitats Regulations Assessment will be necessary.

Mitigation

To offset the nutrient burden resulting from the proposed development, nutrient mitigation will be purchased from Eastleigh Borough Council's strategic scheme for nutrient mitigation. Natural England is of the view that if these measures, including contributions to them, are implemented, they will be effective and reliable in preventing harmful effects on the Habitats Site(s) for the duration of the proposed development.

This advice is provided on the basis that all mitigation measures will be secured as planning conditions or obligations by your authority to ensure their strict and timely implementation for the full duration of the development. Your authority should be assured that proposed financial contribution rates are proportionate to the identified effects of the proposed development, suitably precautionary, and in line with the Retail Price Index, where relevant.

Recreational disturbance - Solent Special Protected Areas (SPAs)

This application is within 5.6km of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and will lead to a net increase in residential accommodation. Natural England is aware that Eastleigh Borough Council have adopted planning policy to mitigate against adverse effects from recreational disturbance on the Solent SPA sites, as agreed by the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SRMP), also known as Bird Aware Solent.

Provided that the applicant is complying with the policy and the Bird Aware Definitive Strategy, Natural England are satisfied that the applicant has mitigated against the potential adverse effects of the development on the integrity of the European site(s), and has no objection to this aspect of the application.

Please note, your authority's appropriate assessment should reflect the current developer contribution rates, which are updated every April in line with the Retail Price Index.

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

Should the developer wish to explore options for avoiding or mitigating the effects described above with Natural England, we advise they seek advice through our [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on consultations@naturalengland.org.uk

Yours sincerely,

Emma Foster
Nature Recovery Adviser
Thames Solent Area Team

Annex A –Natural England general advice

Protected Landscapes

Paragraph 182 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (known as National Landscapes), National Parks, and the Broads and states that the scale and extent of development within all these areas should be limited. Paragraph 183 requires exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated to justify major development within a designated landscape and sets out criteria which should be applied in considering relevant development proposals. [Section 245](#) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 places a duty on relevant authorities (including local planning authorities) to seek to further the statutory purposes of a National Park, the Broads or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England in exercising their functions. This duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

The local planning authority should carefully consider any impacts on the statutory purposes of protected landscapes and their settings in line with the NPPF, relevant development plan policies and the Section 245 duty. The relevant National Landscape Partnership or Conservation Board may be able to offer advice on the impacts of the proposal on the natural beauty of the area and the aims and objectives of the statutory management plan, as well as environmental enhancement opportunities. Where available, a local Landscape Character Assessment can also be a helpful guide to the landscape's sensitivity to development and its capacity to accommodate proposed development.

Wider landscapes

Paragraph 180 of the 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 and 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.

Biodiversity duty

The local planning authority has a [duty](#) to conserve and enhance biodiversity as part of its decision making. Further information is available [here](#).

Designated nature conservation sites

Paragraphs 186-188 of the NPPF set out the principles for determining applications impacting on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and habitats sites. Both the direct and indirect impacts of the development should be considered. A Habitats Regulations Assessment is needed where there is a likely significant effect on a habitats site and Natural England must be consulted on '[appropriate assessments](#)'. Natural England must also be consulted where development is in or likely to affect a SSSI and provides advice on potential impacts on SSSIs either via [Impact Risk Zones](#) or as standard or bespoke consultation responses.

Protected Species

Natural England has produced [standing advice](#) to help planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. 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. A protected species [licence](#) may be required in certain cases.

Local sites and priority habitats and species

The local planning authority should consider the impacts of the proposed development on any local wildlife or geodiversity site, in line with paragraphs 180, 181 and 185 of the NPPF and any relevant development plan policy. There may also be opportunities to enhance local sites and improve their connectivity to help nature's recovery. 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. Emerging [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) may also provide further useful information.

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. A 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](#).

Biodiversity and wider environmental gains

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 180(d), 185 and 186. Major development (defined in the [NPPF glossary](#)) is required by law to deliver a biodiversity gain of at least 10% from 12 February 2024 and this requirement is expected to be extended to smaller scale development in spring 2024. For nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), it is anticipated that the requirement for biodiversity net gain will be implemented from 2025.

Further information on biodiversity net gain, including [draft Planning Practice Guidance](#), can be found [here](#).

The statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) should 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 the [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

The mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 186 of the NPPF should be followed to firstly consider what existing habitats within the site can be retained or enhanced. Where on-site measures are not possible, provision off-site will need to be considered.

Development also provides opportunities to secure wider biodiversity enhancements and environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 74, 108, 124, 180, 181 and 186). Opportunities for enhancement might include incorporating features to support specific species within the design of new buildings such as swift or bat boxes or designing lighting to encourage wildlife.

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

Further information on biodiversity net gain, the mitigation hierarchy and wider environmental net gain can be found in government [Planning Practice Guidance for the natural environment](#).

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

The local planning authority should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in line with paragraph 186 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 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.

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 180 and 181). 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 and the [Data.Gov.uk](#) website

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.

[Green Infrastructure](#)

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#) provides evidence-based advice and tools on how to design, deliver and manage green and blue 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 GI Standards can be used to inform the quality, quantity and type of GI to be provided. Major development should have a GI plan including a long-term delivery and management plan. Relevant aspects of local authority GI 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 104 and 180 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.

Further information is set out in Planning Practice Guidance on the [natural environment](#)