

Date: 30 June 2021
Our ref: 349844
Your ref: BN/135/20/PL



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear James Cross

Planning consultation: Habitats Regulations Assessment & Appropriate Assessment -
Construction of 30 dwellings, new access, public open space, landscaping & associated works
Location: Boweries, Barnham Road, Eastergate, West Sussex PO20 3RT

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 14 April 2021 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

We consider that without appropriate mitigation the application would:

- have an adverse effect on the integrity of Singleton and Cocking Tunnels Special Area of Conservation (SAC) <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>
- damage or destroy the interest features for which Singleton and Cocking Tunnels Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) has been notified.

In order to mitigate these adverse effects and make the development acceptable, the following mitigation measures are required / or the following mitigation options should be secured:

- Buffers to protect habitat features during the construction phase of the proposal.
- Directional lighting and Natural England's suggestions of directing light away from flight lines and foraging habitat.

We recommend that an appropriate planning condition or obligation is attached to any planning permission to secure these measures.

We advise that further information quantifying the specific impacts resulting from this proposal is provided and used to inform specific and appropriate mitigation measures.

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

Habitat Regulations Assessment

Natural England notes that your authority, as competent authority, has undertaken an appropriate assessment of the proposal in accordance with regulation 63 of the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). Natural England is a statutory consultee on the appropriate assessment stage of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process, and a competent authority should have regard to Natural England's advice.

Your appropriate assessment concludes that your authority is able to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any of the sites in question. Having considered the assessment, and the measures proposed to mitigate for any adverse effects, it is the advice of Natural England that it is not possible to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of the sites in question.

Natural England advises that the assessment does not currently provide enough information and/or certainty to justify the assessment conclusion and that your authority should not grant planning permission at this stage.

Further assessment and consideration of mitigation options is required, and Natural England provides the following advice on the additional assessment work required

Further Information Required

Natural England note that the ecology report concludes that the proposal could result in the direct loss of habitat which supports Singleton and Cocking Tunnels SAC.

Linear habitats such as hedgerows and lines of trees are used as flight lines and are key commuting routes to foraging areas for bats, and bats are designated features of the SAC. It is explained in Table 4.3.1 of the HRA to '*Ensure any loss of hedgerows within development is replaced or results in replacement placing with appropriate replacement habitats in application determination*'. We suggest that information to confirm what habitat features will be lost is provided to quantify the impact. When the impact has been quantified we advise this detail is used to inform specific, appropriate mitigation measures.

Natural England support the measures suggested to protect existing habitat features from damage, specifically the installation of secure buffers around such features during the construction phase. To prevent ambiguity in what measures need to be secured, we advise that it is specified which features will be protected by buffers.

In section *Direct Loss of Habitat* of the Screening Assessment, it is explained that there will be a loss of foraging habitat, however this impact has not been addressed or scoped out. We advise that the assessment addresses this impact or information is provided to scope it from the assessment.

We support the inclusion of measures to mitigate impacts from lighting to bats such as utilisation of directional lighting and bat-compatible technology. Further suggestions are available in the Sussex Bat Special Area of Conservation Planning and Landscape Scale Enhancement Protocol. We suggest the lighting scheme directs light away from flight lines and feeding areas.

The possibility of impacts resulting from construction is acknowledged in the HRA, however, we note that impacts such as noise and lighting have not been considered. We advise that the possible impacts resulting from construction are quantified and appropriate mitigation is proposed.

Additional Advice

Please note that if your authority is minded to grant planning permission contrary to the advice in this letter, you are required under Section 281(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 consideration of 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 [REDACTED] Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

Yours sincerely

Perdeep Maan
Sussex and Kent

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 NPPF policies (Paragraphs 170 and 171). 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. 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 paragraphs 171 and 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](#).

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

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>

Annex A – Additional advice

You should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and ancient 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 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 SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

Environmental enhancement

Development provides opportunities to secure net gains for biodiversity and wider environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 72, 102, 118, 170, 171, 174 and 175). 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 should consider off site measures. 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

Paragraphs 98 and 170 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, coastal access routes and coastal margin in the vicinity of the development and the scope to mitigate any adverse impacts. Consideration should also be given to the potential impacts on any nearby National Trails, including the England Coast Path. The National Trails website www.nationaltrail.co.uk provides information including contact details for the National Trail Officer.

Biodiversity duty

Annex A – Additional advice

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.