



Cricklade Court Leet

The Manorial Court for the Hundred and Borough

Mr N Thomas
Director - Planning, Economy, & Regeneration
Wiltshire Council
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

29th August 2025

Dear Mr Thomas,

Failure of the North Meadow SAC Recreational Mitigation Strategy Ref FDMSP-01-23

We are writing to you to ask you to urgently review the North Meadow Interim Mitigation Strategy. We believe this strategy is technically flawed and failing in its primary purpose of protecting North Meadow SAC from recreational pressure. Cricklade Court Leet own part of North Meadow SAC and help Natural England to manage the site.

Wiltshire Council adopted the North Meadow Interim Recreational Mitigation Strategy (NMIMS) in November 2023. This strategy is producing illogical and perverse mitigation outcomes particularly when applied to housing development close to North Meadow SAC. This is best demonstrated by considering two cases which compare the mitigation requirements for example housing developments.

The mitigation strategy specifies two mitigation zones, an inner zone of 0 – 4.2km from North Meadow and an outer zone at 4.2km to 9.4km from North Meadow. It is the inner zone which is problematic.

CASE 1 – Two identical developments of 49 houses within the inner 4.2km zone, one within 500m of North Meadow and the other on the zone boundary at 4km.

Both developments would attract the same mitigation requirement. A one-off payment of £803 per house totaling £39347. The impact on North Meadow would be vastly different in terms of recreational pressure. The impact of a development at 4km (next to Tadpole Garden Village Swindon) would be barely noticeable but the impact of a development at 500m would clearly be much greater and very significant.

The impact of recreational pressure reduces dramatically as distance from the SAC increases and the use of an inner zone is too simplistic.

Footprint Ecology, arguably the UK's leading specialist on recreational pressure mitigation, analysed the change in recreational pressure with distance in their paper on Burnham Beeches Liley, D. (2019) (see page 19 of attached paper).

Table 5: Equivalent numbers of dwellings that would generate similar levels of access to the SAC

Distance from SAC boundary	0.5km	2km	4km	5.6km	6km	10km
Equivalent numbers of dwellings	1	8	57	81	82	84

This shows that a house within 500m of the SAC would produce 57 times more recreational pressure than a house zone at 4km. We don't know the exact relationship for North Meadow, but it is likely to be very similar. We do know from the work done by the Ecological Planning & Research Consultancy (EPR) that 55% of all visitors and 75% of all dog walkers come from within 700m of North Meadow, which strongly supports this relationship.

Treating these two developments the same when one creates 57 times more recreational pressure than the other is clearly illogical. Attachment 1 shows a map of this case.

CASE 2 – two identical developments of 49 houses 600m apart in Cricklade

The two identical developments of 49 houses 600m apart would both pay the inner zone one off payment of £803 per house, which is £39347. A single development of 50 houses would be required to provide a SANG and a one off payment of £16150.

The recreational pressure impact for the two 49 house developments would be the same as a 98 house development in roughly the same location and would clearly produce more recreational pressure than a 50 house single development. Despite this a single development would be required to provide a SANG but the other two developments would not.

This again is illogical, but this is further compounded by the NMIMS inability to cope with multiple developments. There is nothing to prevent a series of 49 house developments meeting the mitigation strategy providing they all pay £39347. There is no provision for combination effects, or any limit on the number of developments.

This may seem theoretical but there are currently three 49 house developments at consultation stage in Cricklade. Attachment 2 shows a map of this case.

Impact on North Meadow SAC

We know from NVC surveys that the designated feature for North Meadow is in decline. It has reduced from 29 hectares (66%) in 2013 to 26 hectares (58%) in 2021, a loss of one acre per year see attached extract from the 2021 NVC Survey.

North Meadow SAC is already suffering from excess recreational pressure. To protect the site from compaction and trampling it was closed to the public in 2023 for 7 weeks (14th April to 4th June), in 2024 for 10 weeks (4th April to 13th June) and in 2025 for 2 weeks (11th March and 26th March). The Direction Notice for 14th April 2023 is attached. This was extended in 2023 and repeated in 2024 and 2025.

Whilst there may be some capacity to absorb additional recreational pressure it makes sense to spread this capacity across as many housing developments as possible. This would be best achieved

by restricting the developments which create the most recreational pressure per house, those closest to the SAC.

Development Exclusion Zone

A fundamental weakness of the NMIMS is the lack of a 500m development exclusion zone. This is particularly important for a small site like North Meadow SAC where the recreational pressure is very concentrated.

Footprint Ecology a recognised authority on recreational pressure mitigation schemes for SACs state in their report on the Dorset Heathlands (Panter et al., 2022):

“For many of the examples of mitigation schemes the exclusion zone is fundamental to ensuring the mitigation package is effective. European sites, where there are exclusion zones, include heathland and woodland SAC sites, for example the Thames Basin Heaths (400m), Cannock Chase (400m), Ashdown Forest (400m) and Burnham Beeches (500m). Within the zone – as with Dorset - there is a presumption against development, i.e. ensuring no increase in the number of dwellings. The reason for a 400m exclusion zone is that there are particular risks associated with development in such close proximity and furthermore mitigation options are not as effective.”

In their Burnham Beeches SAC report in which the site faces similar compaction and trampling issues to North Meadow SAC Footprint Ecology state:

“A development exclusion zone has been established around many other European sites to reflect the particular risks with development directly adjacent to the boundary. Local plans and strategic mitigation schemes include a presumption against development within these areas and such zones have become an established policy approach.

Examples of areas where a zone is in place include:

- *Across the Thames Basin Heaths (11 local planning authorities)*
- *Around the Dorset Heaths (five local planning authorities)*
- *In the Brecks (e.g. Breckland District)*
- *Around the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths (East Devon District Council)*
- *Around Cannock Chase SAC (e.g. Cannock Chase Council Local Plan)*
- *At Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC (e.g. Wealden District’s Core Strategy Local Plan) “*

The lack of a development exclusion zone in the NMIMS is clearly a departure from established policy on SAC mitigation schemes and is the root cause of technical flaws in this strategy.

Newland Homes Development Planning Application PL/2022/02452

The lack of a Development Exclusion Zone in the NMIMS has allowed a 140 house development 280m from North Meadow SAC to be progressed. This development is being mitigated not by the provision of a SANG but by a 11 hectare grassland restoration project called a Habitat Support Area.

We asked Natural England for evidence supporting the conclusion that the proposed mitigation strategy will prevent an increase in visitors to North Meadow. What was provided misrepresents the Footprint Ecology Dorset Heathlands report, we contacted the report’s authors to confirm our understanding of the report. We assume therefore no evidence exists.

All the available evidence including the Footprint Ecology Dorset Heathlands report leads to the conclusion this mitigation strategy will not be effective. There is also a strong case for saying the

proposal is compensation for damage caused to the SAC rather than mitigation and hence illegal under the Habitat Regulations.

If this scheme goes ahead, it will be equivalent to building 160 developments of 50 houses at 4km on the NMIMS inner zone outer boundary. (Based on the Footprint Ecology research the recreational pressure from 140 houses at 500m will be the same as 8000 houses at 4km). It will use up any additional capacity North Meadow has to absorb more recreational pressure and will quite possibly push the site into terminal decline. If the aim is to build as many houses as possible it makes no sense to use up all the available capacity on one development.

It is also likely to make approval of future developments further from the SAC much more difficult as North Meadow SAC could fall into unfavourable condition.

Revising the NMIMS

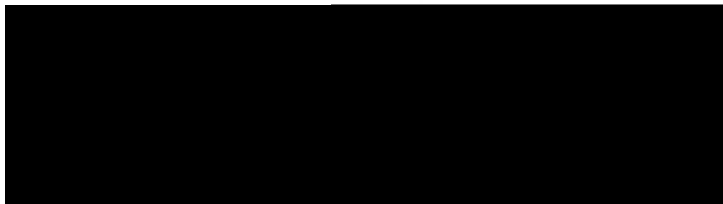
Given the obvious fundamental flaws in the NMIMS we suggest it should be urgently reviewed **and should not be used to support any of the current planning applications covered by this strategy.**

Unfortunately, the NMIMS does not seem to have benefited from any independent professional development. Ecological Planning & Research Consultancy (EPR) produced the visitor analysis but the process for developing the mitigation strategy is not clear.

Such is our concern for the future of North Meadow SAC, the Court would be prepared to help in any way we can to develop a revised mitigation strategy carried out by the leading industry authority on recreational pressure mitigation Footprint Ecology. We would, however, want this to be completed prior to consideration of a full planning application for Newland Homes Development.

We look forward to receiving your comments on our concerns and any suggestions for how we can help to develop a mitigation strategy which is effective in its protection of North Meadow SAC. If it would be helpful to meet to discuss revising the NMIMS we would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,



Clive Smith B.Ed (Hons), C.Ed.
High Bailiff

John Barratt BSc (Hons) Env Sci
Court Hayward

Copy To:

Cllr Adrian Foster - Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Development Management, and Housing
(*Wiltshire Council adopted NMIMS November 2023*)

Cllr Marina Strinkovsky - Cabinet Member for Planning and Placemaking
(*Swindon Borough Council adopted NMIMS July 2023*)

Cllr Juliet Layton - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning
(*Cotswold District Council adopted NMIMS May 2023*)

Cllr Mark Clarke - Chairman Cricklade Town Council

Cllr Nick Dye - Wiltshire Councillor for Cricklade, Latton & Marston Meysey

Dr Roz Savage MP - South Cotswolds constituency (Case Ref: RS6167)

Rachel Williams - Deputy Director, Wessex Area Team Natural England

Professor David Gowing –Director Floodplain Meadows Partnership

Attachments:

1. **Map of CASE 1** – Two identical developments of 49 houses within the inner 4.2km zone one within 500m of North Meadow and the other on the zone boundary at 4km.
2. **Map of CASE 2** – two identical developments of 49 houses 600m apart compared to one development of 50 houses all in Cricklade.
3. **Extract from** - NATIONAL VEGETATION CLASSIFICATION SURVEY NORTH MEADOW SAC, CRICKLADE. JUNE 2021 Ecological Surveys (Bangor)
4. **DIRECTION NOTICE: RESTRICTION OF PUBLIC ACCESS UNDER THE COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000** – Closure of North Meadow 14th April 2023 Case Number 2023049867

References

1. NMIMS - North Meadow Interim Mitigation Strategy
https://www.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/download/2657/north_meadow_and_clattinger_farm_interim_recreation_mitigation_strategy_2023-2028 Accessed 18/08/2025
2. Panter, c., Liley, D., Caals, Z., Saunders, P. & Clarke, R. (2022). Urban development and the Dorset Heaths: long term analysis & evidence base review. Unpublished report by Footprint Ecology for the Urban Heaths Partnership. <https://www.dorsetheaths.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Dorset-Heaths-long-term-analysis-report.pdf> Accessed 18/08/2025
3. Liley, D. (2019). Impacts of urban development at Burnham Beeches SAC: update of evidence and potential housing growth, 2019. Unpublished report by Footprint Ecology for Chiltern and South Bucks Councils. (paper attached)

Cricklade Court Leet Charity, a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered in England,

Registered Charity No. 1179807,

Registered Office 19 Manor Orchard Cricklade SN6 6EA

The Manorial Court of the Hundred and Borough of Cricklade

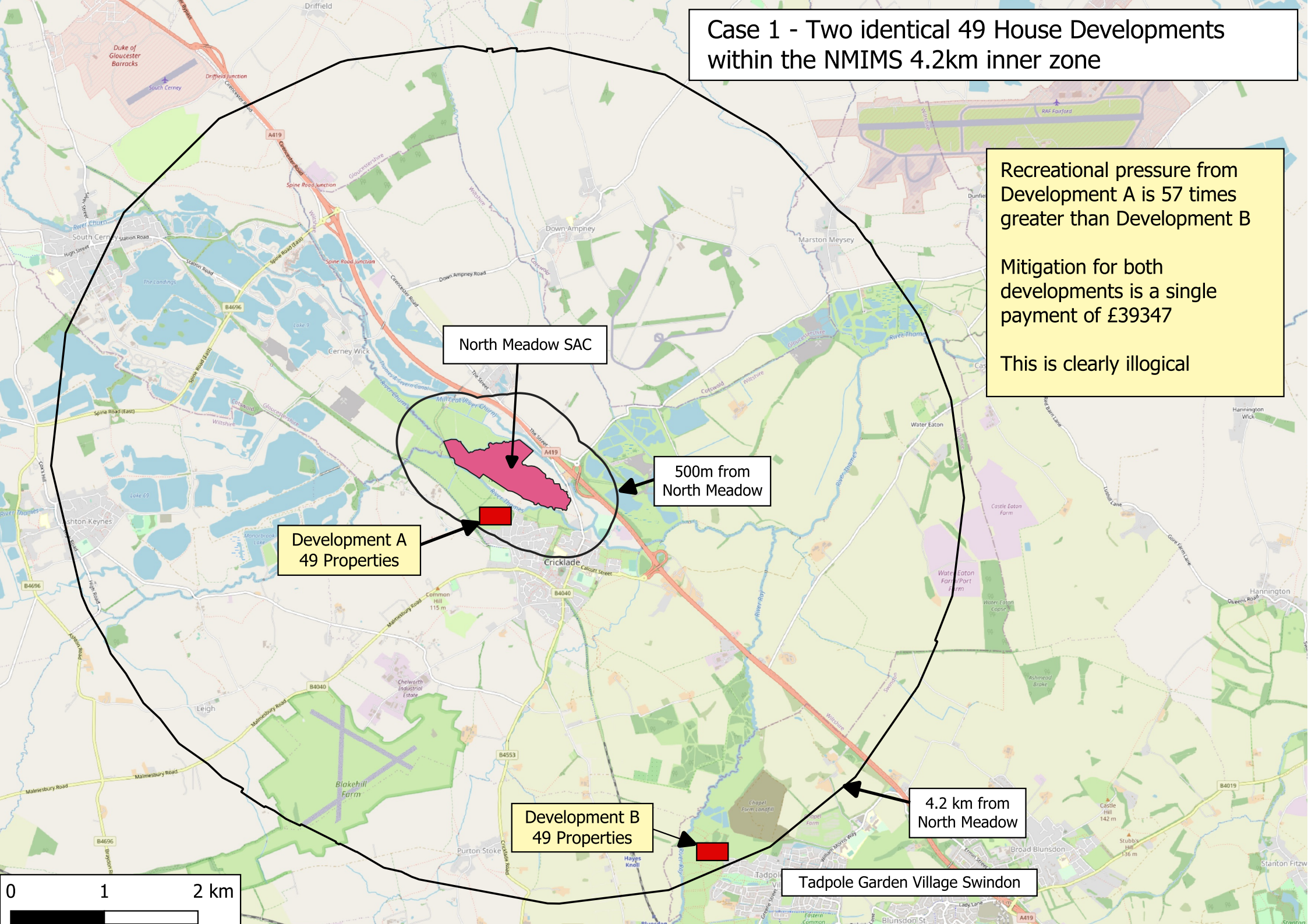
www.crickladecourtleet.org.uk

Case 1 - Two identical 49 House Developments within the NMIMS 4.2km inner zone

Recreational pressure from Development A is 57 times greater than Development B

Mitigation for both developments is a single payment of £39347

This is clearly illogical



North Meadow SAC

500m from North Meadow

Development A
49 Properties

Development B
49 Properties

4.2 km from North Meadow

Tadpole Garden Village Swindon

0 1 2 km

CASE 2 – two identical developments of 49 houses 600m apart

North Meadow SAC

The mitigation requirement for both developments is a one off payment of £39347

The recreational pressure from these two developments would be the same as a single development of 98 houses

A single development of 50 houses would need to provide a SANG and a one off payment of £16150

This is clearly illogical

Bloor Homes Application
PL/2021/10404 for 49 houses

500m from North Meadow

Cricklade

Hannick Homes Application
PL/2023/10331 for 49 houses

0 250 500 m

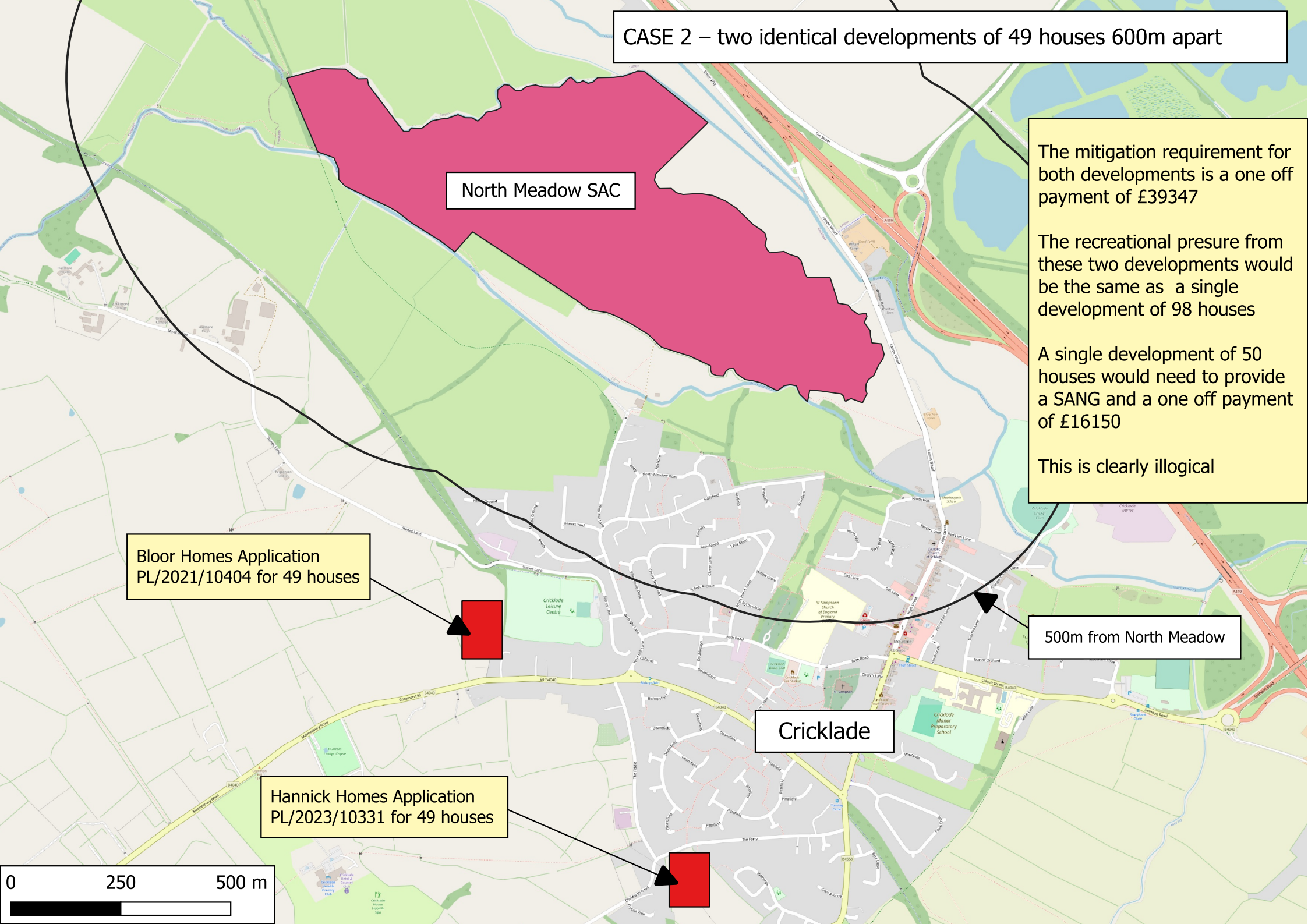


Table 9. Comparison of community areas (% cover of total site area) between 1995/96 and 2013. See Table 1 for community names.

Community: 2013	Community name 2021	1995/96	2013	2021
Ruderal marginal + MG1		0.31	1.27	1.4
MG5a		8.08	nil	nil
MG4 Dactylis	MG4a	37.09	1.77	0.39
MG4 Typical	MG4b	33.07	20.30	31.42
MG4 Holcus	MG4c	5.34	14.97	6.72
MG4 Agrostis	MG4d	0.72	28.88	19.61
MG7C Filipendula	MG15	10.68	24.14	27.11
Inundation communities	MG16 + others	4.71	5.40	3.58
Carex a/a stands	MG4Cx and MG15 Cx	nil	3.27	3.41
MG4 Species rich (D + T)		70.16	22.07	31.8
MG4 Species poor (H + A)		6.06	43.83	26.33

Several points of interest arise:

- There has been no return of the area of the driest MG5 community since 2013.
- In 2013 there was a very substantial rise in the area covered by the relatively species poor MG7C *Filipendula* unit (MG15 community), there has been a modest further increase in area between 2013 and 2021 though the distribution has changed with MG15 replacing MG4c along the Thames boundary but decreasing in the east where it is being replaced by MG4d.
- The small areas of inundation communities have remained largely faithful to their original loci in the channels and show a modest decline in area in 2021 compared to 2013
- The development of bulky *Carex* stands so apparent in 2013 has been largely reversed, although large sedges are still present on the site their vigour is much reduced and no stands could be described as 'dominated by sedges' in 2021. The extent of MG4 and MG15 in which sedges remain prominent appears remarkably similar to that mapped in 2013, with only minor changes in its distribution.
- The shift in composition of the sub units of MG4 noted in 2013 has been slightly reversed. Although there has been a further decline in the extent of the driest, MG4a, subcommunity there does appear to have been an expansion of the similarly rich, but

DIRECTION NOTICE: RESTRICTION OF PUBLIC ACCESS UNDER THE COUNTRYSIDE AND RIGHTS OF WAY ACT 2000

The relevant authority – Natural England - gives this direction for nature conservation purposes under section 26 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 to give effect to the exclusion or restriction detailed below.

This direction is to be read in conjunction with the separate map/site notice bearing the case number below.

Case number: 2023049867

Site name: North Meadow

Date of issue: 14th April 2023

Expiry date: 19th May 2023

Period of restriction/exclusion

Access is to be excluded in the way described below at all times.

Nature of restriction

Public access by virtue of section 2(1) of CROW to the land detailed below is to be “excluded” (under Section S26(3)(a)).

Land affected

The map/site notice which accompanies this direction shows the land affected by this restriction (displayed in red hatching on the map)

Grid reference: 409940 , 194522

Reason why this direction has been given:

The relevant authority Natural England is satisfied that restriction of the access rights to the extent specified is necessary in order to protect sensitive wildlife.

Information and conditions which apply to this direction

1. This direction only affects the availability of public access rights conferred by virtue of section 2(1) of CROW. It has no effect on public rights of way over the same land, or on existing open access rights of the type listed at CROW section 15, or on any other access right, tradition or custom, or any uses of the land permitted or tolerated by the landowner.
2. It has no effect on any area within the specified land that is not otherwise subject to the access rights described above – for example it has no effect on land which is excepted under Schedule 1 to CROW.

Revocation or variation of direction

3. Natural England may revoke or vary this direction by giving a further direction at a later date, if it considers this necessary.

Review of direction

4. Natural England will review the need for this direction within five years of the date of issue shown at the top of this notice and, subsequently, within five years of the date of the last review, until the direction is revoked or expires, as required by CROW section 27(3).

Further contact

For further information on restrictions and exclusions of public access to open access land or coastal land, write to the Open Access Contact Centre at:

Natural England
Horizon House
Deanery Road
Bristol
BS1 5AH

Or call on 0300 060 2091 or email; openaccess@naturalengland.org.uk.

Natural England



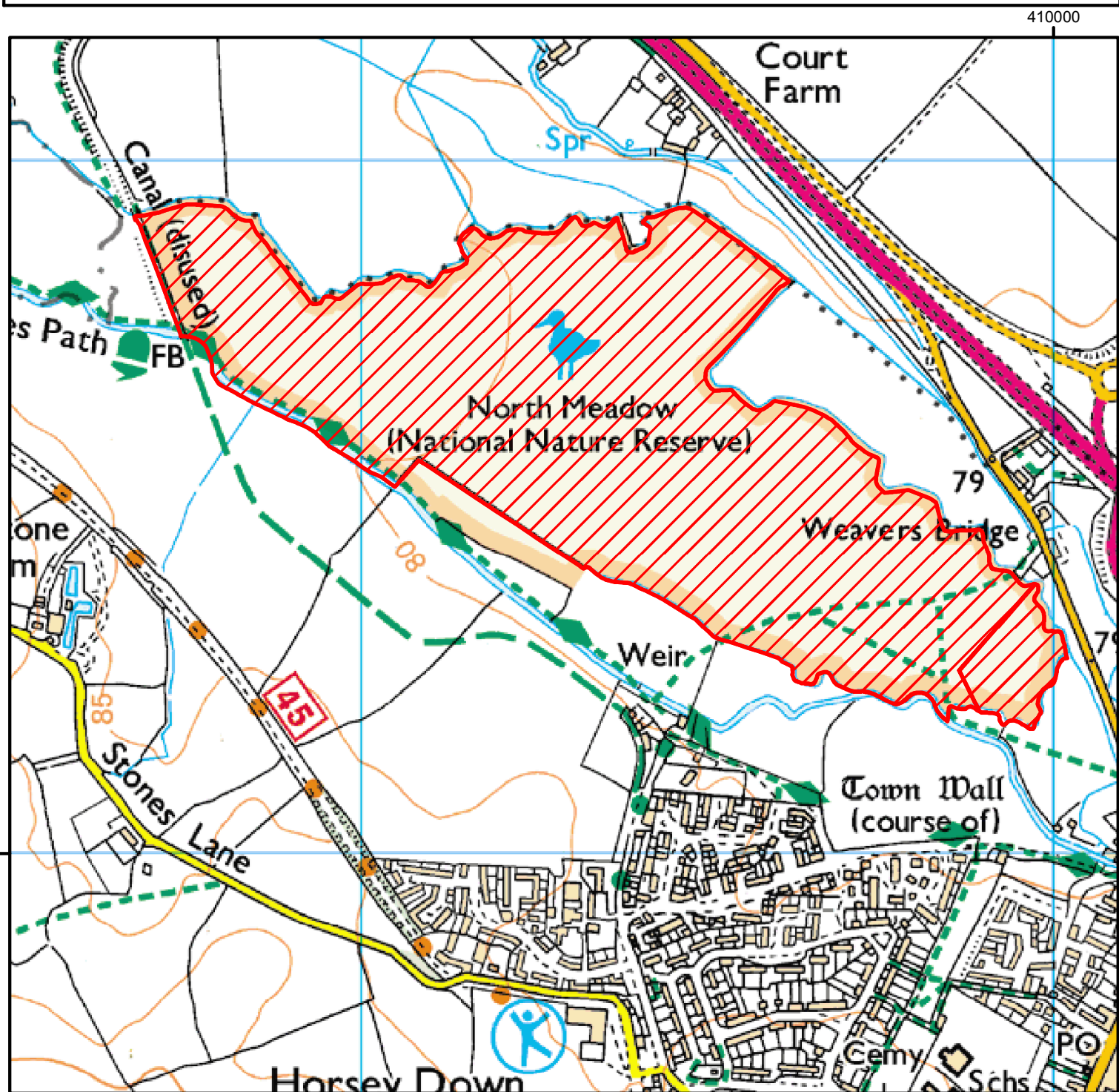
CROW Access Restrictions

To Protect sensitive plantlife and habitat:
Access to the land hatched in red is closed

Dates: 14/04/2023 to 19/05/2023

Case Number: 2023049867

This does not affect Public Rights of Way (shown in green).
Dogs should be kept on leads and to Public Rights of Way.



0 140 280
Metres

© Crown Copyright and database right 2023. All rights reserved.
Ordnance Survey Licence number 100022021.



CROW Access Land



CROW Access Restriction



For more information call the Open Access Contact Centre on 0300 060 2091
or visit our website at www.gov.uk/right-of-way-open-access-land/use-your-right-to-roam