



Cricklade Court Leet

The Manorial Court for the Hundred and Borough

Joe Richardson
Planning Department
Wiltshire Council
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

22nd April 2026

Dear Mr Richardson,

**Response to Ethos Environmental Planning Representation dated 16th March 2026 –
Reserved Matters Application PL/2026/00347 Land at Stones Farm Cricklade**

1. The Ethos comments explain the rationale for the mitigation approach and its alignment with established practice. However, it does not provide evidence demonstrating that the proposed measures will be effective in this specific location, particularly given the proximity of the development to the SAC and the availability of direct access routes. As such, the conclusions appear to rely on reasonable expectation rather than demonstrable effectiveness.

Can mitigation reasonable in principle, be shown to work in practice

2. The Outline Planning Appeal Inspector's Appropriate Assessment established that mitigation is required and that, in principle, a Habitat Support Area (HSA) could provide that mitigation. However, the Inspector did not assess the detailed design, accessibility, or behavioural effectiveness of the HSA, as these matters were reserved. The conclusion of no adverse effect on integrity is therefore contingent on the mitigation functioning as intended. It is now for the Council, as competent authority, to demonstrate that the specific proposals submitted at Reserved Matters stage can achieve that outcome beyond reasonable scientific doubt.
3. The question at this stage is not whether the mitigation approach is reasonable in principle, but whether it has been demonstrated to be effective in practice in this specific context.
4. The Inspector's decision anticipated ongoing discussions on the design of the "strategic landscaping". Wiltshire Council have confirmed no discussions have taken place with Newland Homes or their Agents since the appeal decision. Natural England also stated at a meeting with

Cricklade Town Council and Cricklade Court Leet on 22nd January 2026 that little or no discussion has taken place with Newland Homes or their Agents. The Reserved Matters application is largely silent on the operation of the recreational pressure mitigation strategy.

Material Changes to the Mitigation Strategy

5. It is noted that paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the Ethos comments appear to assume connectivity between the recreational and biodiversity components of the Habitat Support Area. However, the Reserved Matters application indicates that this connection has been removed (***Detailed HSA Landscape Plans -Hedgerow planting as schedule. No access from HSA to recreation area***). In addition, all the paths around the Biodiversity HSA have been removed.
6. This is a material change which suggests the Biodiversity HSA (8 hectares) no longer has role in reducing visitors to North Meadow SAC. The recreational pressure mitigation now depends on a 2.9 hectare Recreational HSA which is dominated by a 0.5 hectare SUDS lake.
7. The effectiveness of the HSA is critically important for this development as it is located next to North Meadow (within 280m). Recreational pressure reduces exponentially with distance from North Meadow, and the consequences of a failing mitigation strategy will be severe on the integrity of the SAC. The effectiveness of the HSA depends on influencing established patterns of recreational behaviour, yet no site-specific evidence is provided demonstrating that such behavioural change will occur.
8. To satisfy the habitat regulations integrity test the detail design of the HSA must be demonstratively effective and deliverable with adequate safeguards for corrective management, if robust monitoring shows that to be necessary. Further evidence of the requirement for effective mitigation is Natural England's closure of North Meadow between 13th March and 14th April this year to protect the site from soil compaction and trampling damage.

Effectiveness of SAMM contributions

9. Recent information provided by Wiltshire Council, including the mitigation warden role description, provides further insight into how the mitigation strategy is intended to operate in practice. The role is focused on engagement and encouraging responsible behaviour, rather than controlling access or preventing physical impacts such as trampling and soil compaction. As such, the effectiveness of the mitigation relies on voluntary behavioural change, which is inherently uncertain. The sustainability of this role is also uncertain as it may not be possible for it to be funded in perpetuity. This is consistent with evidence from recent Environmental Information Regulation responses indicating that delivery of mitigation measures has proved difficult in practice.

In- Combination effects with adjacent development (PL/2026/02134)

10. It is also noted that a new planning application for approximately 315 dwellings has recently been submitted on land adjacent to the site. While the details of that proposal are not considered here, it represents an additional potential source of recreational pressure on North Meadow SAC. In this context, the effectiveness of the mitigation strategy becomes even more critical, and any uncertainty as to its ability to function in practice is further amplified.

Summary

11. Rather than weakening the mitigation provisions accepted in principle but not demonstrated in practice during the planning appeal, the Reserved Matters application needs to explain in detail how the HSA will prevent an increase in visitors to North Meadow SAC and how it will interact with the existing access routes to deflect visitors to the HSA.
12. In summary, while the mitigation approach may be considered appropriate in principle, the information provided does not demonstrate that it will be effective in practice. In the absence of clear, site-specific evidence, it is not possible to conclude, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that the proposed measures will prevent adverse effects on the integrity of North Meadow SAC.

Yours sincerely



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Court Hayward

Copy To:

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Cllr Mark Clarke - Chairman Cricklade Town Council
Cllr Nick Dye - Wiltshire Councillor for Cricklade, Latton & Marston Meysey
Clive Smith - High Bailiff, Cricklade Court Leet Charity

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