

Date: 23 April 2026
Our ref: 541943
Your ref: PL/2026/01072



Jemma Foster
Case Officer
Wiltshire Council

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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Ms Foster,

Planning consultation: Outline planning application, with all matters reserved except for the main point of access from Devizes Road, for the demolition of existing building and development of up to 80 dwellings, public open space, drainage, landscaping and ancillary works.

Location: Land North of Devizes Road, Hilperton, Trowbridge

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 19 February 2026.

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.

Bath & Bradford on Avon Bat SAC – Objection further information required

The application site lies within an area known to support bats that form part of the populations for which the Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC is notified and therefore has the potential to affect its interest features. European sites are afforded protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations').

In considering the European site interest, Natural England advises that you, as a competent authority under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations, should have regard for any potential impacts that a plan or project may have¹. The [Conservation objectives](#) for each European site explain how the site should be restored and/or maintained and may be helpful in assessing potential impacts.

On the basis of information provided, Natural England's advice is that this proposed development will require mitigation measures intended to avoid or reduce the likely harmful effects on a European site which cannot be taken into account when determining whether or not a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a site and requires an appropriate assessment (following the People Over Wind ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union). For this reason, the proposed mitigation measures need to be formally checked and confirmed by your Authority, as the competent authority, via an Appropriate Assessment.

¹ Requirements are set out within Regulations 63 and 64 of the Habitats Regulations, where a series of steps and tests are followed for plans or projects that could potentially affect a European site. The steps and tests set out within Regulations 63 and 64 are commonly referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations Assessment' process.

The Government has produced core guidance for competent authorities and developers to assist with the Habitats Regulations Assessment process. This can be found on the Defra website. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/habitats-review/implementation/process-guidance/guidance/sites/>

Natural England notes that the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) has not been produced by your authority, but by the applicant. As competent authority, it is your responsibility to produce the HRA and be accountable for its conclusions. Natural England is a statutory consultee at the Appropriate Assessment stage of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process. The following advice is provided to support the conclusions drawn and to assist your authority to undertake an Appropriate Assessment:

Bat Activity

The submitted survey results demonstrate that the site is used by at least 10 bat species, including all four Annex II species as well as species considered threatened in the UK (serotine). Please note that although not separated from other possible myotis species the assessment should assume that Bechstein's bat are using the site to forage.

Based on the submitted information Natural England considers the proposed development site to be valuable for bats. In particular, the site is strategically located as an important bat corridor between the roosting sites to the south (including Green Lane Wood) and foraging opportunities around the copse north of Knoll Farm, the canal and the River Avon to the north of the site. Bat commuting corridors have been identified on the eastern and western boundaries of the site.

We also note that the fields to the southwest of the stables include areas of permanent grassland surrounded by areas of mixed scrub and woodland creating a sheltered glade, ideal for bat foraging. Permanent grasslands are likely to support cockchafer beetles which are an important food source of greater horseshoe bats and unless a cockchafer larval survey demonstrates otherwise this should be assumed in the assessment to be a significant greater horseshoe bat foraging resource. It should be noted that cockchafer beetles are known to go through cyclic population fluctuations so that in some years numbers may be low, with the population increasing in subsequent years. The high level of bat activity recorded in the area southwest of the stables, including by the Annex II species, confirm the areas relative importance.

Bat Roost

The bat surveys have demonstrated that the disused stables (Building B1) are an active greater and lesser horseshoe bat roost (GHB and LHB). The roost was being used by GHB late in the summer with 2 bats recorded on cameras in August. Based on the information available, the possibility of the disused stables being used as a GHB mating roost cannot be discounted, with low counts at any one time but potentially a far higher number of individuals using the roost over the mating season. If this is the case, then the roost would be far greater ecological significance than the submitted information suggests. Further, more detailed surveys completed through October would be required to determine the status of the roost.

Grassland Assessment

We understand that a detailed botanical assessment is due to be undertaken in Spring/Summer 2026. We will await the results of this survey before commenting on this matter. Please reconsult Natural England when the botanical survey has been submitted.

Proposed Bat Mitigation

Natural England welcomes the provision of the 50m ecological buffer along the eastern boundary of the site which with appropriate planting will help in time to mitigate for the loss of permanent grassland and scrub associated with the proposals and will help ensure commuting routes through the development are maintained. Nevertheless, the proposed layout will result in the loss of a significant proportion of the available permanent grassland and associated scrub habitats used for foraging by bats, including GHB, LHB and, in all likelihood, Bechstein's bat. Further, the proposals will lead to the loss of several bat roosts including a roost used by both GHB and LHB and which may be used as a GHB mating roost.

Further justification should be provided as to why the old stables building used by horseshoe bats cannot be reused and incorporated into the new development with connectivity to adjoining habitat maintained. Such an approach would be a potential "satisfactory alternative" that should be considered by the application. If the loss of the stables is considered unavoidable then details of the

proposed replacement roosts should be provided prior to determination. These should include details of the location of the replacement roost within the development site and architectural drawings to show detailed design, dimensions and materials to be used. The scheme will need to demonstrate how roosting opportunities for both GHB and LHB will be provided within the structure as the two species should be provided with separate roosting areas. In addition, new crevice roosting opportunities should be provided within appropriately located buildings within the development.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

The proposed scheme falls within the buffer zone to provide mitigation in line with the Trowbridge and Westbury Bat Mitigation Strategy (TWBMS) and thus would be required to provide SANG and a financial contribution to strategic habitat mitigation. For residential development, the financial contribution is £972.03 per dwelling and should be secured via a legal agreement prior to determination.

The scheme proposes to provide the required SANG within the 50m bat corridor, which is stated as providing circa 1ha of potential SANG which is 0.46 ha below the minimum size criteria for the size of development proposed. The sHRA for the scheme suggests the short fall in SANG area can be made up through use of strategic SANGs that are allocated in the draft Local Plan. Natural England objects to this approach as there is no certainty that the strategic SANG will be available for use at first occupation.

Further the size criteria for a SANG is only the minimum area required, in addition consideration should be given to the attractiveness and functionality of the SANG for recreational use by the new residents and the existing population. This should include opportunities for letting dogs off the lead, the inclusion of features that are attractive to the users of the SANG, including provision of open areas and ensure provision of attractive circular walks of between 2.3 and 2.5 km. For this reason, SANGs are often required to provide a far larger area than the minimum criteria and include features such as accessible open water and links to the wider footpath network. In this case the area proposed for the SANG is also required to provide bat habitat, including a requirement for a replacement bat roost. There is therefore likely to be conflicting objectives for the land, for example access will need to be excluded from the vicinity of the replacement roost, which will further reduce the available SANG area.

Based on the information provided Natural England advises that the proposed SANG area is not sufficient to serve as a functioning SANG, nor is it well integrated into the developed area and insufficient information is provided on how the SANG will meet both its recreational and bat habitat mitigation objectives. Further information will also be required on how the required circular walks will be provided, what habitats and infrastructure will be incorporated to improve the attractiveness of the SANG and how it will be managed in perpetuity.

Lighting Strategy

Natural England welcomes the considerations of the impacts of lighting. The lighting strategy for the development must meet the lux levels prescribed in the TWBMS guidance. The lighting strategy for the scheme should consider the construction and operational phases and be agreed by your Authority. We further advise that a post-development lighting survey is secured by planning condition and that any remedial measures will be implemented in areas of excess light levels.

Natural England must therefore advise that permission is not granted until the SANG arrangements and bat mitigation measures have been agreed.

Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS)

It is recommended that the onsite SuDS are designed to hold permanent water. This should be conditioned with any granted permission and should use suitable aquatic planting to increase the sites capacity to provide foraging opportunities for bats and improve the area's attractiveness to residents.

Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)

A CEMP for the scheme to avoid and mitigate effects on ecological features should be agreed by your Authority prior to commencement of the scheme.

Other Matters:

Protected Species

The scheme will impact on a number of protected species including bats, reptiles and otters. Natural England has produced [standing advice²](#) to help planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. We advise you to refer to this advice. The final protected species mitigation strategy should be agreed by your Authority's Ecology Team.

Biodiversity and wider environmental gains

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 187(d), 192 and 193. Major development (defined in the [National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) glossary) is required by law to deliver a biodiversity gain of at least 10% from 12 February 2024 and this requirement was 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.

For further information on the timetable for mandatory biodiversity net gain, we refer you to [Biodiversity Net Gain moves step closer with timetable set out - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) provides more information on biodiversity net gain and includes a link to the draft [Biodiversity net gain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Planning Practice Guidance.

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. We refer you to [Calculate biodiversity value with the statutory biodiversity metric - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) for more information. For small development sites, [The Small Sites Metric - JP040 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#) may be used. This is a simplified version of the statutory biodiversity metric and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

The mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 193 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.

Where off-site delivery of biodiversity gain is proposed on a special site designated for nature (e.g. a SSSI or habitats site) prior consent or assent may be required from Natural England. More information is available on [Sites of Special Scientific Interest: managing your land](#). Development also provides opportunities to secure wider biodiversity enhancements and environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 77, 109, 125, 187, 188 and 193). 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.

[The Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool - Beta Test Version - JP038 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#) 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 statutory biodiversity metric. [Natural environment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) provides further information on biodiversity net gain, the mitigation hierarchy and wider environmental net gain.

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

Should the developer wish to discuss any of the above with Natural England, we recommend that they seek advice through our Discretionary Advice Service.

² <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me directly.

Yours faithfully,

Kyle Conroy
Sustainable Development Higher Officer
Wessex Area Team

Annex A – Additional advice

Natural England offers the following additional advice:

Wider landscapes

Paragraph 187 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 [Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment \(GLVIA3\) - Landscape Institute](#) for further guidance.

Biodiversity duty

Section 40 of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) places a duty on the local planning authority to conserve and enhance biodiversity as part of its decision making. We refer you to the [Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) for further information.

Designated nature conservation sites

Paragraphs 193-195 of the NPPF set out the principles for determining applications impacting on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and habitats sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Both the direct and indirect impacts of the development should be considered. A Habitats Regulations Assessment is needed where a proposal might affect a habitat site (see [Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and Natural England must be consulted on 'appropriate assessments' (see [Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) for more information for planning authorities).

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 the [SSSI Impact Risk Zones \(England\) \(arcgis.com\)](#) or as standard or bespoke consultation responses. Section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 places a duty on all public bodies to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of their functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the features for which an SSSI has been notified ([Sites of special scientific interest: public body responsibilities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)).

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 187, 188 and 192 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 environmental records centre, wildlife trust, geoconservation groups or recording societies. Emerging [Local nature recovery strategies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) may also provide further useful information.

Those habitats and species which are of particular importance for nature conservation are included as 'priority habitats and species' 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. We refer you to [Habitats and species of principal importance in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) for a list of priority habitats and species in England. You should consider priority habitats and species when applying your 'biodiversity duty' to your policy or decision making

Natural England does not routinely hold priority 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. We refer you to the [Brownfield Hub - Buglife](#) for more information

Annex A – Additional advice

and Natural England's [Open Mosaic Habitat \(Draft\) - data.gov.uk](#) (Open Mosaic Habitat inventory), which can be used as the starting point for detailed brownfield land assessments.

Green Infrastructure

For evidence-based advice and tools on how to design, deliver and manage green and blue infrastructure (GI) we refer you to [Green Infrastructure Home \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#) (the Green Infrastructure Framework). 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 [GI How Principles \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#). 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.

The [Green Infrastructure Map \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#) and [GI Mapping Analysis \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#) are GI mapping resources that 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 105 and 187 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 any nearby National Trails. We refer you to [Find your perfect trail, and discover the land of myths and legend - National Trails](#) for information including contact details for the National Trail Officer.

Appropriate mitigation measures should be incorporated for any adverse impacts on Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access, and National Trails.

Further information is set out in the Planning Practice Guidance on the [Natural environment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).