

Appropriate Assessment of Effects on a European Site

This is a record of the appropriate assessment of Wiltshire Council required by Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The project has been assessed as likely to have significant effects upon one or more European protected sites and is not directly connected to or required for the management of such sites. This assessment is made in accordance with the relevant HRA guidance documents.

PART A: INFORMATION REVIEWED	
Information about the plan or project	Wiltshire Council Planning Application Reference No: PL/2026/00347 Proposed Development: Approval of Reserved Matters (Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale) Following Outline Planning Permission PL/2022/02452 for 140 Dwellings, a Habitat Support Area and Associated Landscaping and Works. Address: Land at Stones Farm, Cricklade The development lies within the inner zone of influence (0-4.2km) for the North Meadow National Nature Reserve (NNR)/Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) component of North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC, notified as an exceptional example of lowland meadow with a very high proportion of the surviving UK population of snake's head fritillary. The development is screened into Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations 2017 (as amended) on account of its potential to cause adverse effects through increased recreational pressure, alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. The application is supported by: • HSA Landscape -Key Plan 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-DR-A-0001. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd • HSA Landscape-Detail Area1-Recreational Area 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-00-DR-A-0002. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd • HSA Landscape-Detail Area 2-HAS Area, ponds 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-))-DR-A-0003. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd • Landscape Maintenance Plan. June 2026. Peter Quinn Associates • Detailed Landscape Proposals. June 2026. Peter Quinn Associates • 10 Year Landscape Maintenance Programme. January 2026. Q Ethos • Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. August 2026. Ethos • Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. September 2026. Ethos The application site lies almost adjacent to western boundary of North Meadow, Cricklade SSSI and NNR, a component of the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC and falls within the associated SSSI 'Impact Risk Zone'. The site is comprised of modified grassland with areas of other neutral grassland, bound by native hedgerows with occasional mature willow trees. The River Thames forms the northern boundary of the site and is locally bordered by areas of scrub and riparian vegetation.

	The application is of a scale that it raises concerns relating to adverse effects both alone and in-combination with other projects. In combination with other proposed and permitted projects, there could be an increase of 536 dwellings within 4.2 km of the SAC. Given the number of dwellings proposed at each location, their proximity to the SAC, and the fact that these schemes approach and in some cases exceed the 50-dwelling threshold identified in the Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy, there is the potential for likely significant effects on the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC as a result of the following: • Increased recreational pressure arising from the introduction of additional residential dwellings within close proximity to the SAC; • Disturbance to qualifying habitat and species as a result of increased human presence/eutrophication from additional dog walking; • In-combination recreational effects arising from other residential developments within the 4.2 km inner zone, resulting in cumulative pressure that could undermine the conservation objectives of the SAC. The North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy 2023-2028 sets out a rationale based upon evidence of visitor access patterns which would allow residential development to come forward with appropriate mitigation. In the light of the recent ECJ ruling (People Over Wind & Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta (Case C 323/17)) which concluded that the avoidance/mitigation, such as set out in the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy, cannot be taken into consideration when considering the Likely Significant Effects of proposals on European/habitats sites (and Ramsar sites as a matter of Government policy), the Council has determined that the application should be subject to an Appropriate Assessment under Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).
European site(s)	North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation (SAC) The SAC is divided into two units • North Meadow near Cricklade • Clattinger Farm near Ashton Keynes and Somerford Keynes. North Meadow is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a National Nature Reserve (NNR), which includes almost 4km of designated pathways around the site to facilitate access, open to the public. Clattinger Farm SSSI is managed by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve. As Clattinger Farm is under private ownership, it is not considered to be subject to damaging recreational pressure. Recreational impacts on Clattinger Farm are therefore not predicted as part of the proposed development, and therefore Clattinger Farm SSSI is screened out of further Appropriate Assessment.

List of Site interest features	Qualifying Features/Habitats for the SAC are: H6510 Lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>) The conservation objectives for the SAC are: “Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring; • The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats • The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and • The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely.” European Site Conservation Objectives publication date: 27 November 2018 (version 3).
Information about the site	The current condition of the European Site is favourable but under review. This site contains a very high proportion (>90%) of the surviving UK population of snake’s-head fritillary <i>Fritillaria meleagris</i>, a species highly characteristic of damp lowland meadows in Europe and now rare throughout its range. The qualifying habitats are lowland hay meadows (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>, <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>). This habitat type comprises species-rich hay meadows on moderately fertile soils of river and tributary floodplains. Most examples are cut annually for hay, with light aftermath grazing. Seasonal flooding maintains an input of nutrients. The SAC's hay meadow vegetation communities are dependent on moist, but not waterlogged soils on floodplains. Defining and maintaining the appropriate hydrological regime is a key step in moving towards achieving the conservation objectives for this site and sustaining this feature. Soil compaction and eutrophication, especially after flood events can have significant impacts on plant assemblages, altering the species richness of the site. Managing recreational use is vital to achieving the conservation objectives for this site.
Other relevant plans or projects	• North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Special Area of Conservation Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy 2023-2038 (May 2023) • Wiltshire Core Strategy adopted January 2015 • PL/2026/02134 Land North and South of Stones Lane. Outline permission for up to 315 dwellings • PL/2021/10404 Land off Common Hill. Outline permission for residential development of up to 49 dwellings • PL/2025/07863 - Land North-West of the B4553, Cricklade. Full permission for 43 dwellings • PL/2023/10331 - Land south of The Forty and North of Chelworth Road, Cricklade, Wiltshire. Outline application for up to 49 dwellings • PL/2022/04776 Ashton Keynes, favourable determination at Appeal
PART B: IMPACT PREDICTION	
Likely Significant Impact(s)	Predicted Effect of Impact(s)

Recreational Trampling, Soil Compaction leading to localised/altered flood events	Increased recreational pressure associated with residential development would be likely to result in higher levels of footfall within the SAC, particularly along established walking routes. Repeated trampling would intensify pressure on the sensitive floodplain meadow soils, leading to soil compaction, reduced soil porosity and permeability, and changes in vegetation structure and species composition. The SAC currently accommodates approximately 4km of designated walking routes, equating to around 0.8ha (approximately 1.8%) of the overall lowland meadow habitat. Increased use of these paths by a growing local population may accelerate path widening, edge effects and the spread of disturbance-tolerant grass species, resulting in a gradual reduction in the extent and quality of qualifying habitat lowland meadow. Compaction of floodplain soils has the potential to disrupt natural drainage and floodwater infiltration, altering the duration, extent and distribution of seasonal flooding across the meadow. Compacted areas may become increasingly waterlogged, while other areas may dry more rapidly following flood events. In addition, increased areas of hardstanding associated with nearby development may contribute to more rapid surface water runoff, further increasing the risk of localised flooding. Such changes could adversely affect the hydrological conditions required to sustain species-rich lowland hay meadow habitats, which are dependent on moist but not waterlogged soils and a carefully balanced flood regime. Unmitigated recreational pressure would result in a decline in habitat condition through trampling, soil compaction and altered flooding dynamics, adversely affecting the structure and function of the qualifying lowland hay meadow habitat and undermining the conservation objectives of the SAC.
Eutrophication/Nutrient enrichment from increased recreational pressure and dog faeces	Increased dog walking associated with nearby residential development can result in elevated nutrient inputs from dog fouling, leading to eutrophication of the meadow soils. Increased nutrient enrichment from dog faeces can disrupt this balance, favouring competitive grass species, at the expense of characteristic meadow flora, reducing species diversity. In particular, snake's-head fritillary, a key qualifying feature of the SAC, may decline in abundance where nutrient levels increase beyond optimal thresholds. Unmitigated recreational pressure would increase the frequency and intensity of dog walking by local residents at the designated site, with likely adverse effects on the structure and function of SAC habitats.
Litter	Increased visitor numbers increase the risk of littering within the SAC, including food waste, packaging and dog-related items. Litter can directly damage vegetation, introduce contaminants, and detract from effective site management operations. Unmitigated recreational pressure/higher visitor numbers would result in increased litter that has the potential to undermine habitat quality and interfere with conservation management objectives.

Interference with hay production e.g. dog toys in the grassland; dog faeces in the grassland; flattened grasses.	Increased recreational use resulting from higher local population levels can interfere with hay production through dog fouling, dog toys left within the grassland, trampling of standing vegetation, and flattened grasses. Unmitigated recreational pressure would increase interference affecting both the timing and effectiveness of hay cuts, with implications for nutrient balance, species regeneration and long-term habitat condition.
Interference with grazing e.g. free-roaming dogs	Increased recreational pressure, particularly from free-roaming dogs, has the potential to disrupt grazing livestock, alter grazing patterns and reduce the effectiveness of grazing management. Unmitigated recreational pressure increases likely disturbance to grazing indirectly affecting vegetation structure and species composition, with implications for the condition of the SAC habitats.
Picking of Flowers	Increased residential development within close proximity to the SAC is likely to increase visitor numbers to North Meadow SAC during the snake's-head fritillary flowering season. Increased visitor pressure raises the risk of flower picking, intentional or accidental, which can directly reduce reproductive success and population resilience of this highly characteristic species of damp lowland meadows. Unmitigated recreational pressure would result in repeated disturbance of flowering plants, undermining long-term population stability and conflicting with the SAC conservation objective to maintain or restore the structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats.

PART C: IMPACT PREDICTION IN-COMBINATION

In combination with other plans or projects?

All applications that may impact North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC are subject to Habitat Regulations Assessment and Appropriate Assessment (AA) where necessary. Only applications with AAs that have reached a favourable conclusion are permitted.

The North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy (NMIRMS) provides a framework for assessing and mitigating recreation-related impacts arising from residential development. Particular consideration is given to the cumulative effects of residential growth within the 4.2km Inner Zone of Influence, where increased recreational activity has the potential to adversely affect the SAC through trampling, soil compaction, nutrient enrichment associated with dog walking, disturbance to grazing and hay cutting operations, littering and other recreation-related pressures. Applications within this zone are therefore assessed not only in relation to their individual impacts, but also in combination with existing, approved and proposed developments that may contribute to increased recreational pressure on the SAC.

Mitigation measures are expected to contribute towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures and, where necessary, provide additional mitigation capable of functioning as an effective alternative recreational resource. Such mitigation may include targeted measures addressing specific recreational pressures affecting the SAC, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) or SANG-equivalent provision, and other agreed mitigation measures capable of diverting recreational activity away from North Meadow SAC.

The following key developments and planning applications could have cumulative effects and are considered below.

- PL/2026/02134 Land North and South of Stones Lane. Outline permission for up to 315 dwellings
- PL/2021/10404 Land off Common Hill. Outline permission for residential development of up to 49 dwellings
- PL/2025/07863 - Land North-West of the B4553, Cricklade. Full permission for 43 dwellings
- PL/2023/10331 - Land south of The Forty and North of Chelworth Road, Cricklade, Wiltshire.
- PL/2022/04776 Ashton Keynes, favourable determination at Appeal

The Habitats Regulations require consideration of the potential effects of the proposal both alone and in combination with other plans and projects. The principal pathway for in-combination effects in this case relates to the potential for increased recreational pressure arising from cumulative residential growth within the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC Zones of Influence.

Those applications close to, or reaching the 50 unit threshold are also being scoped in for in-combination consideration therefore ensuring mitigation is secured for each proposal. the competent authority can be therefore satisfied that any in-combination effects are avoided through the implementation of the strategic mitigation framework.

PART D: CONSEQUENCES FOR CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Does the project or plan have the potential to:

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring **the structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats.**

Without mitigation, the project alone and in combination with other residential developments, is likely to increase recreational pressure on the North Meadow SAC due to its proximity and accessibility. Increased visitor use may result in localised trampling and physical disturbance of the qualifying lowland hay meadow habitat, which could lead to a gradual reduction in habitat extent, particularly in areas subject to repeated footfall. This has the potential to adversely affect the extent and distribution of the qualifying habitat.

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring **the supporting processes on which**

In the absence of mitigation, increased recreational pressure could adversely affect the structure and function of the qualifying lowland meadow habitat through trampling, soil compaction, eutrophication from dog fouling, and disturbance of traditional hay cutting and grazing regimes. These impacts may alter soil structure, vegetation composition, and competitive relationships between plant species, leading to a decline in the abundance and distribution of characteristic species, including snake's-head fritillary. Such changes could compromise the ability of the habitat to function as a species-rich floodplain meadow.

qualifying natural habitats rely.	
Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring the supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely	Increased recreational pressure, particularly from dog walking, has the potential to disrupt key supporting processes that underpin the qualifying habitat, including nutrient cycling, soil permeability, and hydrological functioning. Eutrophication from dog fouling and soil compaction associated with repeated trampling may interfere with natural drainage and seasonal moisture regimes that are essential for maintaining favourable conditions within the lowland hay meadow. In combination with other nearby developments, these pressures could adversely affect the processes that support the long-term viability of the SAC's qualifying features.

PART E: MITIGATION FOR APPLICATION

How will these measures avoid or reduce impacts upon site integrity?

As outlined in the ecology response dated 24/09/2026, the proposed development incorporates a package of mitigation measures intended to address potential recreational impacts on the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC. This includes the provision of a Habitat Suitability Area (HSA) and Recreational Greenspace, designed to provide alternative opportunities for informal recreation and dog walking thereby reducing recreational pressure on the SAC.

The effectiveness of this approach has previously been recognised by the Planning Inspector within the appeal decision (APP/Y3940/W/24/3351265), who concluded that the proposed HSA would support the objectives identified within the Site Improvement Plan (SIP), including Action 2A, which seeks to reduce the fragmentation of semi-natural grasslands surrounding the SAC; Action 2B, which seeks to secure the long-term conservation management of buffer land adjacent to North Meadow and facilitate grassland restoration; and Action 4A, which seeks to minimise the impacts of trampling associated with recreational use through the provision of additional accessible natural greenspace. By providing alternative walking routes and informal recreation areas in close proximity to the development, potential for trampling, soil compaction, disturbance associated with dog walking, littering, interference with grazing and hay cutting operations and damage to characteristic plant species will be mitigated. The Recreational Greenspace will also support facilities such as dog waste disposal and maintained walking routes, providing an alternative recreational destination.

In addition, Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contributions will be secured through the Section 106 Agreement at a rate of £331.62 per dwelling prior to the commencement of development providing an additional £46,426.80, as set out within Schedule 8 of the signed legal agreement. These contributions will support the delivery of strategic mitigation measures identified within the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm Interim Recreation Mitigation Strategy 2023-2028

The submitted documents to support the Reserve Matters Application

- HSA Landscape -Key Plan 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-DR-A-0001. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd
- HSA Landscape-Detail Area1-Recreational Area 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-00-DR-A-0002. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd

- HSA Landscape-Detail Area 2-HAS Area, ponds 2917-RDJWL-ZZ-))DR-A-0003. July 2026. Robert Davies John West Ltd
- Landscape Maintenance Plan. June 2026. Peter Quinn Associates
- Detailed Landscape Proposals. June 2026. Peter Quinn Associates
- 10 Year Landscape Maintenance Programme. January 2026. Q
- Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. August 2026. Ethos
- Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. September 2026. Ethos

And relevant conditions (Conditions 16 and 17) of the Appeal Decision, together with the obligations secured through the Section 106 Agreement, provide an appropriate mechanism for the long-term delivery, management, monitoring and funding of the HSA and Recreational Greenspace. Monitoring reports will assess whether the HSA is achieving its intended recreational and ecological objectives and where monitoring identifies shortcomings, adaptive management measures can be agreed through the steering group and implemented using secured funding mechanism,s.

These measures will ensure that the alternative natural greenspace is established prior to occupation, retained for the lifetime of the development and managed in accordance with agreed ecological objectives, which will be subject to review and steering committee engagement.

The habitat creation and enhancement measures proposed within the HMMP will provide additional areas of species-rich grassland and associated habitats that reflect the character of the qualifying habitats of the adjacent SAC. This will contribute to maintaining and strengthening the ecological function of land surrounding the designated site, whilst supporting the conservation objectives relating to the extent, distribution and quality of qualifying habitats.

PART E: CONCLUSION

Is the project likely to affect site integrity?

a) Alone?	The combination of on-site mitigation measures, together with the management, monitoring and funding commitments secured through the legal agreement, provides sufficient certainty that any potential recreational effects on the North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC will be effectively mitigated. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the proposal will not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.
b) In combination with other plans or projects?	The proposal must be considered in combination with other residential developments that have come forward, within close proximity to the SAC that may cumulatively increase recreation-related pressure on the qualifying features. The application is of a scale which raises concerns regarding adverse effects on the SAC, both alone and in combination, with other residential proposals. Of particular relevance are: • PL/2026/02134 Land North and South of Stones Lane- 315 dwellings • PL/2021/10404 Land off Common Hill - 49 dwellings • PL/2025/07863 - Land North-West of the B4553 - 43 dwellings • PL/2023/10331 - Land south of The Forty and North of Chelworth Road, Cricklade, Wiltshire- 49 units • PL/2022/04776 Ashton Keynes- 70 tourist units As mitigation is secured for this proposal and would similarly be required for other plans and projects with the potential to affect the SAC, the Competent Authority can be satisfied that any in-

	combination effects are avoided through the implementation of the strategic mitigation framework.
Recommendation:	
Taking into account the mitigation measures and management provisions secured through the Appeal, Reserved Matters Application and associated Legal Agreements, it is our opinion that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, having regard to its conservation objectives.	
Name of officer(s) making the assessment	Jenna Buss Senior Ecologist, Wiltshire Council 23/09/2026
Date:	
Natural England Comments	
Name of Natural England officer	
Date:	