

Date: 13 November 2018
Our ref: 261815
Your ref: 18/504836/EIOUT



Simon Rowberry
Interim Major Projects Manager
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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Simon Rowberry

Planning consultation: Outline application (with all matters reserved apart from access) for the erection of up to 1,750 dwellings including affordable housing, 46,000 sq.m of commercial space, a hotel, a local centre, a new primary school, a park and ride facility, strategic highways improvements including new Kent Showground access/egress, accesses/roads including a new bridleway bridge, parking, associated open space, landscaping, services, and Sustainable Drainage Systems. In addition the proposals include a publicly-accessible country park including the Binbury Motte and Bailey Castle Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Location: Binbury Park Bimbury Lane Detling Maidstone Kent

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 27 September 2018 which was received by Natural England on that date, and for the subsequent consultation including additional information in your letter dated 16 October 2018.

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

OBJECTION

Natural England **objects** to this proposal.

Given the size and scale of this proposal and the harm it would cause to the Kent Downs AONB, we consider it is a matter of national importance. We therefore advise that if the local authority should be minded to approve this development proposal, Natural England will consider it necessary to **seek call-in** of the application so that it can be determined by the Secretary of State against the relevant tests set out in the NPPF.

We advise that the application site falls within the boundary of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). AONBs are nationally important landscapes designated to conserve and enhance their natural beauty. Natural England is concerned that the size and scale of the proposals would introduce a major adverse impact on the special qualities of the Kent Downs AONB.

In our view, a proposal of this scale represents major development in an AONB, with regard to the tests set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We further consider that the proposal, which would result in the direct loss of part of a nationally importance designated landscape, cannot be mitigated to reduce the adverse impact to an acceptable level.

Natural England therefore **objects** to this planning proposal.

We note that the proposal is not supported by an allocation in the local plan. Natural England works to support effective, long-term plan making, and we consider a proposal for major development affecting an AONB that falls outside of the adopted local plan should not be supported.

Our view is supported by the NPPF, which advises (in paragraph 11 and footnote 6) that AONBs are areas of particular importance that provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area. The NPPF also provides clear guidance that '*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*' In addition, the guidance on development within AONBs in the NPPF, which was revised in July 2018, states that '*The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited.*'

Given the size and scale of this proposal and the harm it would cause to the Kent Downs AONB, we consider it is a matter of national importance. We therefore advise that if the local authority should be minded to approve this development proposal, Natural England will consider it necessary to **seek call-in** of the application so that it can be determined by the Secretary of State against the relevant tests set out in the NPPF.

As agreed with the local authority, we will provide our substantive comments on the detail of the application in due course.

Should the developer wish to explore options for avoiding or mitigating the effects described above with Natural England, we advise they seek advice through our [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on 02080268033.

Yours sincerely

Julia Coneybeer
Senior advisor, Sussex and Kent area team