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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mrs Fay

Planning consultation: Mixed use development of up to 1,700 dwellings including affordable housing and care provision; 10,000sqm of employment space in the form of a business park; village centre with associated retail, commercial, community and health faculties; open space including the provision of suitable alternative natural green space (SANG); biodiversity enhancements; solar array, and new roads, access arrangements and associated infrastructure (Outline Application with all matters reserved apart from access off Hillbury Road)

Location: Land To The South Of Ringwood Road Alderholt

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.

Natural England has recently visited the site with the applicants agent.

This site does not form part of an allocated site and hence has not been formally assessed by the Council as part of its Local Plan process either in terms of its impacts on biodiversity and landscape or its wider planning considerations such as need and sustainability.

Objection further information required

Summary

Natural England advise that it cannot confirm to the Council that there will not be adverse effects on the integrity of the following sites because of insufficient information to confirm mitigation proposals are certain and secured:

- **Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar and Dorset Heaths SAC**
- **River Avon SAC, Avon Valley Ramsar**
- **New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar**

River Avon SAC, Avon Valley Ramsar : phosphates

Appendix 9.2 :The Information for HRA indicates that a full assessment of the likely level of nutrient phosphate, which is acknowledged as complex, has not been provided for the Council to consider. Rather a Grampian condition is proposed. The applicant has not provided any details to provide certainty that they have secured an agreed and deliverable mechanism in principle eg through securing credits available from approved phosphate offsetting projects in the river. Therefore the Council cannot be certain that the necessary measures are affordable, secured and deliverable in relation to development phases. The Council cannot conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites because the measures have not been shown to be secured and

are thus not certain.

New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar : recreational impacts

Since Natural England met with the applicants advisor in 2022 the eight competent authorities surrounding the New Forest have reviewed the evidence from a comprehensive visitor survey of recreational uses in the designated sites. The Councils and Natural England have agreed that the predicted level of development coming forward around the designated sites will require additional measures over and above that provided through the Dorset SPD. The above designated sites are c. 3km from the development site and are sensitive to similar adverse effects from increased recreation pressures to the Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar and Dorset Heaths SAC. A 13.8km zone of influence is proposed within which recreational impacts require mitigation. However at this time no agreed strategy has been considered by the competent authorities in this area (including Dorset Council). Therefore the authority is advised that there will be a Likely Significant Effect on these sites without appropriate mitigation but cannot conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the integrity of the sites because the measures necessary are as yet not confirmed. Ongoing work with the Councils advisors indicates that this site is likely to be able to secure suitable measures but these are as yet not confirmed.

New Forest SAC/SPA/Ramsar : air quality

Natural England note the advice by the national park concerning air pollution (27 April 2023) and advise that the current air pollution modelling is inadequate to allow a conclusion that there will not be a Likely Significant effect on the designated sites either alone or in-combination with a number of significant development coming forward around Fordingbridge. The inclusion of these sites in the modelling is also relevant to an in-combination assessment of effects on the Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar and Dorset Heaths SAC although the applicant would be able to make use of the Interim Air Quality Strategy if necessary. This strategy is interim and it is not certain that measures set out would be continued in the current form. Natural England advise that the authority is unable to conclude that there will not be an adverse effect on the designated sites listed above either alone or in-combination based upon the evidence submitted.

App 9.4 SANG Management Plan

The overall management outlined in the plan is agreed in principle subject to a more detailed plan. In particular the size, profiling and management of SuDs and other waterbodies to ensure safety of residents and their pets. The extent and condition of pine woodland cover at the Cross Roads Plantation SANG compartment will require active management and a reduction in woodland cover. Enhancements proposed to ensure that the SANG quality, currently low, is suitable when required eg soil nutrient status, native woodland/hedge planting with added value species such as native fruiting trees.

Natural England confirm that the three SANG areas identified at Map 3 (53.4ha) could provide a suitable capacity of new accessible greenspace for the proposed development in relation to the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework SPD. It is noted that App 9.2 uses an incorrect occupancy figure of 2.4.

The Cross Roads Plantation compartment is particularly well placed to intercept existing public pressures.

The Plan sets out three areas of SANG and indicates that delivery will be phased, however there is no information to confirm that development phases will be sufficiently closely linked and located to delivery of SANG areas of suitable sizes. It is unclear from the plan if these three areas represent the intended phasing proposals.

The mechanisms by which the SANG could be secured and maintained in perpetuity are *outlined* but not determined in sufficient detail to allow Natural England to confirm that the mitigation will be secured. The proposed mechanisms should be narrowed to a preferred option with sufficient detail to allow adequate scrutiny by the authority.

Access to the west of the site

Natural England is concerned that there is a risk of public access westwards with a development of this scale in close proximity to the designated sites at Cranborne Common and with the wider area of Ringwood Forest as an attraction which is accessible. Following on site discussions it appears that the southern parcel which has a consent for a solar facility which is as yet not constructed offers an opportunity to establish an effective barrier. The adjoining land owner is managing an extensive grazing area around the designated sites and it is proposed that an area, approximately indicated in yellow at Annex 1, which no longer forms part of an agricultural unit should be incorporated. The mechanism is yet to be considered, however this would establish a clear fenced boundary with grazing stock present with no direct public access and also bring into the wider positive management the smaller parcels of designated site to the west of Sleepbrook. This will also allow the brook its self to be encouraged into a more natural and functional condition for example by introducing woody debris and meanders etc.

Dorset Heathlands : SAMM

The applicant may reliably make use of the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework SPD to secure mitigation through a financial contribution and the authority can conclude that there would be no adverse effect.

Technical Appendix 7.1 Transport Assessment and Appendix 7.3 Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Assessment

Natural England advise the Council that at the two Appendices 7.1 and 7.3 make reference to the provision of access to Ringwood Forest and via that to Alderholt (E34/10) with the following commitment in App 7.1 at para 3.22:

“The proposed development will seek to make connections to these routes to ensure the opportunity to walk and in particular, cycle to Verwood is an attractive possibility.”

Paragraphs 3.20 to 3.22 of App 7.3 further consider access from the application site to Verwood via Ringwood Forest, in particular.

Natural England **strongly object** to this proposal which is contrary to the significant efforts elsewhere in the plan to provide mitigation and avoidance measures intended to demonstrate that there will not be an adverse effect on the designated sites at Cranborne Common which is bisected by the RoW. It seems also that the information to inform an HRA App 9.2 has not considered this proposal which should be addressed in the Councils own assessment. The applicant in indicating these routes will be better linked to the development has failed to consider the increased risk of recreational impacts on the designated sites as well as on biodiversity within the forest which is noted else where in this advice.

Other matters of concern

Natural England advise that the authority will need to require a lighting strategy through a planning condition. This will need to confirm sensitive locations and secure lighting in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust Lighting Standards. This will avoid impacts to bats as well as foraging nightjar.

Natural England is concerned that in the absence of adequate visitor management measures in the adjoining forestry there will be impacts on priority habitats and protected species, these include rare reptiles, breeding Goshawk etc. The applicant should consider how these adverse impacts can be addressed.

Ecology and Biodiversity

Natural England concur with the advice of the NET dated 28/4/2023.

Cranborne AONB

Natural England note the comments provided by the AONB Partnership and advise the Council to take full account of the matters raised as they affect the AONB.

I trust this advice will assist the Council in determining the application.

Yours sincerely

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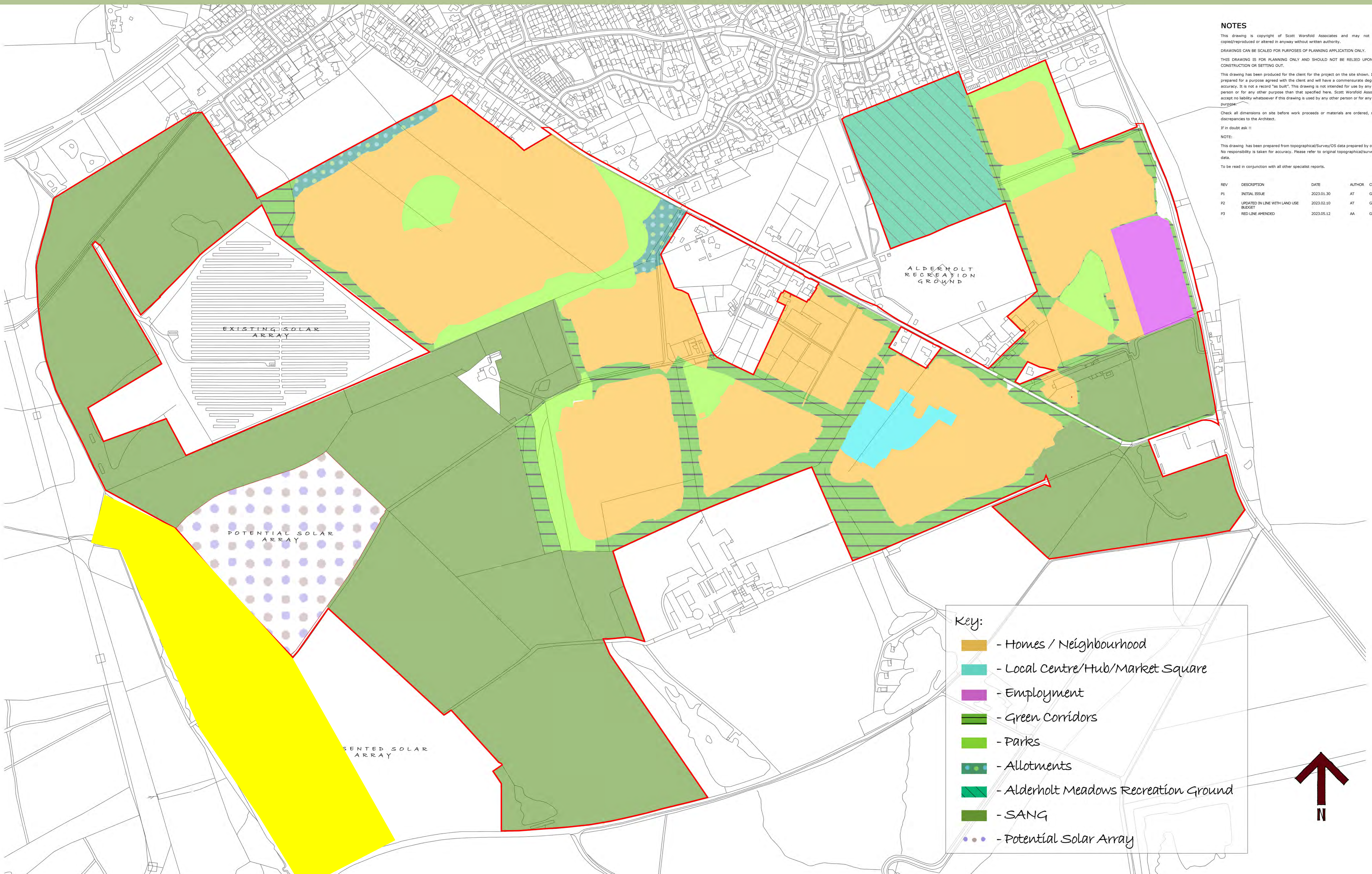
Annexe 1

Plan showing functional land adjoining Sleepbrook which should be incorporated into the wider extensive grazing area around the Cranborne Common designated sites to further deter public access.

NOTES

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REV	DESCRIPTION	DATE	AUTHOR	CHKD
P1	INITIAL ISSUE	2023.01.30	AT	GW
P2	UPDATED IN LINE WITH LAND USE BUDGET	2023.02.10	AT	GW
P3	RED LINE AMENDED	2023.05.12	AA	GW



Key:

- Homes / Neighbourhood
- Local Centre/Hub/Market Square
- Employment
- Green Corridors
- Parks
- Allotments
- Alderholt Meadows Recreation Ground
- SANG
- Potential Solar Array

