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**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Dear Leanne Palmer

**Planning consultation:** Access to/from Parsonage Road between Weston Group Business Centre and Innovation Centre buildings leading to: 96 dwellings on Bulls Field, south of Prior's Wood, including associated parking, landscaping, public open space, land for the expansion of Roseacres Primary School, pedestrian and cycle routes to Smiths Green Lane together with associated infrastructure.

**Location:** Land to the north of Roseacres, between Parsonage Road and Smiths Green Lane, Takeley, Essex, CM22 6NZ (Land known as Bull Field, Warish Hall Farm, Takeley, Essex).

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 29 November 2024 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

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**

**NO OBJECTION - SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATE MITIGATION BEING SECURED**

We consider that without appropriate mitigation, the application has potential to damage or destroy the interest features for which Hatfield Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR) has been notified.

**To mitigate these adverse effects and make the development acceptable, the following mitigation measure should be secured through a planning condition:**

- Financial contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures identified by the National Trust as landowners of £1,395 /new residential dwelling.

**Further advice on mitigation**

Hatfield Forest is a National Nature Reserve (NNR). It is nationally designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and regarded to be of international importance for its ancient wood pasture-forest habitats. The interest features of these habitats are vulnerable to recreational impacts and within recent years there has been increasing concern regarding the number of visitors. It has been noted that there have been significant increases in visitor numbers, linked to nearby residential

development. Both Natural England and the National Trust therefore have concerns regarding the impacts of increasing visitor pressure on the designated site and it is apparent that the current number of visitors is exceeding carrying capacity of some important SSSI habitats and features.

The National Trust has undertaken visitor surveys to establish a Zone of Influence (ZOI) for recreational impacts to Hatfield Forest SSSI / NNR, which has been determined to be 11.1km. Natural England regards this information as material and therefore would anticipate that the application be assessed in the context of these issues and the developing strategic solution. Please note Natural England's Impact Risk Zones have since been updated to reflect this ZOI. New residential housing within this ZOI is likely to damage the interest features of Hatfield Forest SSSI/NNR.

The evidence in relation to recreational pressure has been shared with Uttlesford District Council and we wrote to all Local Planning Authorities identified as falling within the ZOI to confirm Natural England's position on 28 June 2021. The currently proposed Mitigation Strategy comprises two elements:

- 1) Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) package of measures undertaken within Hatfield Forest NNR/SSSI, to increase the resilience of the ancient woodland to recreational pressure; and,
- 2) For larger developments of 100+ dwellings, on and/or off-site measures.

A meeting was convened on 24 April 2024 between the four LPAs and the National Trust as landowners, chaired by officers from Natural England. At the meeting, the affected LPAs agreed the total cost of the SAMM package to be implemented by the National Trust and how to apportion the total cost across the four LPAs, based on proportional visitor impact and number of new dwellings planned. The four LPA partners are currently working on a draft Governance Agreement relating to the Mitigation Strategy to formalise the outcomes of that meeting.

We would take this opportunity to highlight the Local Planning Authority's duties under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), notably under section 28G with respect of the SSSI. Appropriate measures, such as the mitigation outlined above, should therefore be taken to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the SSSI. This is further reflected within paragraphs 174 and 180 of the NPPF, whereby authorities should seek to protect and enhance the natural environment, including sites of biodiversity value. Natural England advises that mitigation measures are sought to ensure compliance with the above referenced national policies.

**Natural England advises that permission should not be granted until such time as the following mitigation measure has been secured through a planning condition:**

- Financial contribution towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) measures identified by the National Trust as landowners of £1,395 /new residential dwelling.

#### **Uttlesford Local Plan Submission Version (December 2024)**

The Planning Inspector will be aware of the emerging Uttlesford District Council (UDC) Local Plan, which was submitted for examination on 18 December 2024 (see [library of submitted documents](#)). The site allocations in the UDC Local Plan Submission Version include an allocation that overlaps with the site under re-determination by PINS. The Local Plan site allocation is larger than the application under re-determination by PINS and includes further land to the east, for 1,546 new dwellings, a new secondary school, two new primary schools with early years offer, and employment / a new local centre.

In the UDC Local Plan Site Development Templates ([Appendix 2-4 of the submitted Local Plan](#), page 17), the land under re-determination by PINS, Prior's Wood and further land to the north (i.e. all land to the west of Smiths Green road) is shown as a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

(SANG) for housing allocated to the east of Smiths Green, in order to mitigate negative recreational pressure impacts on Hatfield Forest SSSS/NNR from 1,546 new dwellings.

The [SANG and Country Park Study](#) (LUC, June 2024), submitted as part of the evidence base for the new UDC Local Plan, determined that a SANG area of 29.7ha will be required to mitigate the negative recreational pressure impacts of the new residents on Hatfield Forest SSSI/NNR; a figure that is based on Natural England's SANG Guidelines of 8ha/1000 new population.

Should the re-determination result in planning permission being granted, the housing proposed at the Takeley site in the submitted Local Plan would need to provide an alternative SANG of a minimum of 29.7ha, within a catchment area of 5km. SANG catchment areas are based on the size of the SANG: the Planning Inspector for the South East Regional Plan determined that SANG over 20ha would have a catchment of 5km. There is no alternative land suitable for a SANG identified in the UDC Local Plan Submission Version that could mitigate the negative recreational pressure impacts of the Takeley site allocation. As such, were the SANG identified in the site allocation be unavailable, the housing element of the Takeley site allocation would be sterilised unless an alternative SANG could be found.

### **Main issues for redetermination by PINS**

The main issues for redetermination are the effect of the proposal on:

- i. the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the Countryside Protection Zone;
- ii. the significance of nearby heritage assets including Warish Hall moated site and remains of Takeley Priory SAM, the Grade 1 listed Warish Hall and Moat Bridge, along with other designated and non-designated heritage assets;
- iii. the adjacent ancient woodland at Priors Wood, and;
- iv. whether any adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole or whether specific NPPF policies indicate that development should be restricted.

Natural England's comments on the above four issues are as follows.

- i. NE notes that, in the UDC Local Plan Submission Version, the western part of the Takeley allocation mentioned above will remain in the Countryside Protection Zone, forming the SANG for the new development, with a countryside character. As such, the current proposal under re-determination is within the CPZ Policy for the UDC Local Plan Submission Version.
- ii. NE has no comment.
- iii. NE concurs with the conclusions of the Planning Inspector in relation to the potential effects of the proposal on the adjacent ancient woodland at Prior's Wood, in their Appeal Decision APP/C1570/W/22/3291524, i.e. *that neither the proposed road or cycleway within the buffer or proposed housing in the vicinity, would lead to indirect effects on the ancient woodland as identified in the [Natural England] Standing Advice [for Ancient Woodland], given the proposed measures set out in the Prior's Wood Management Plan.*
- iv. NE has no comment.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter, please contact Fiona Martin, via

Yours sincerely

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