



**SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

Habitat Regulations Assessment

27th September 2024



S23/0055

Project:	Outline planning application for the erection of up to 1,350 residential units (Use Class C2 and C3); a two-form entry primary school (Use Class F1); local centre (Use Classes E, F2 and public house, wine bar or drinking establishment; drinking establishment with expanded food provision; and hot food takeaway for the sale of hot food where consumption is mostly off premises); road between Ryhall Road and Little Casterton Road; removal of existing noise bund; associated green infrastructure including provision of public open space, landscaping, formal and informal play areas; utilities (including drainage); and associated access, including potential realignment of part of Ryhall Road, ancillary works and structures (All matters reserved)
Location:	Land to the north of Stamford
Applicant	Burghley Stamford North Limited, Burghley House Preservation Trust, John Stephen Banks and GummerLeathes
Application Type:	Outline Planning Application with Environmental Impact Assessment
European Site(s) potentially affected	Barnack Hill and Holes Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Component SSSI	Barnack Hills and Holes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
Other designation(s) potentially affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barnack Hills and Holes National Nature Reserve (NNR) Great Casterton Road Banks SSSI Tolethorpe Road Verges SSSI

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Corporate Priority:

Growth

Decision type:

Regulatory

Wards:

Belvoir

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document is a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) relating to a proposed development of Land to the north of Stamford for which outline planning permission is sought. The HRA has been prepared by South Kesteven District Council (“the competent authority”) as part of the steps required to fulfil the relevant provisions of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (“the Habitat Regulations”).
- 1.2 Regulation 7 of the Habitat Regulations states that a “competent authority” includes a local authority such as South Kesteven District Council. Regulation 8 states that a “European site” means a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is defined in Regulation 3 as having the meaning given by Article 1 of the Habitats Directive.
- 1.3 Regulation 63 of the Habitats Regulations sets out the general provisions for the protection of European sites and European offshore marine, including the assessment of implications on European sites and European offshore marine sites.
- 1.4 Regulation 63(1) requires a competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or given any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which:
- (a) Is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects); and
 - (b) Is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site.
- to make an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project on the European site having regard to the European site’s conservation objectives.
- 1.5 Regulation 63(2) requires that the person applying for such permission must provide sufficient information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment (or to enable it to determine whether an appropriate assessment is required).
- 1.6 Regulation 63(3) requires that for the purposes of the assessment, the competent authority, must consult with the appropriate nature conservation body (in this case Natural England), and have regard to any representations made by that body. Regulation 63(4) states that the competent authority must also, if it considers it appropriate, seek the opinion of the general public.
- 1.7 Regulation 63(5) states that in light of the conclusions of the appropriate assessment, the competent authority must only grant planning permission if it has ascertained that the project will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site or European offshore marine site (as the case may be).
- 1.8 Regulation 63(6) requires that when considering whether the project will adversely affect the integrity of the site, the competent authority must have regard to the manner in which it is proposed to be carried out, or to any other conditions or restrictions which may be imposed as part of any planning permission granted.
- 1.9 The assessment as to whether a proposal is likely to have significant effects on a European site forms the Screening stage of the HRA. In respect of the Screening process, relevant Case Law has established that:
- The assessment is to be undertaken in a precautionary manner;

- A plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a European site if the risk cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information; and
 - At the Screening stage, the decision-making should not take into account any mitigation measures built into the project with the intention of reducing or otherwise avoiding harmful effects on the European site.
- 1.10 If the decision-maker cannot rule out the risk of a proposal having a significant effect on the conservation objectives of a European site at the screening stage, they must proceed to carry out an appropriate assessment.
- 1.11 At the appropriate assessment stage, the decision-maker must assess the likely significant effects of the proposal on the integrity of the European site and its objectives; and consider ways to avoid or mitigate any potential for an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. In relation to the appropriate assessment, Case Law has established:
- The precautionary principle also applies at this stage;
 - A high standard of evidence is required, capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt, otherwise the relevant consent should be refused.
 - Mitigation measures – including matters proposed by the Applicant, and controls such as planning conditions and Section 106 obligations, must be taken into account. However, in order to be taken into account, these mitigation measures must have a high degree of certainty as to their effectiveness and delivery.

2 Description of the application site

- 2.1 The application site comprises an area of approximately 81.12 hectares (200.45 acres) of land situated immediately to the north of the existing main built-up area of Stamford. The site currently comprises of a range of arable agricultural fields, playing pitches, parking areas and 10m acoustic bund associated with the Borderville Sports Centre, and the River Gwash Corridor. The site also includes areas of deciduous woodland, poor semi-improved grassland, and various field boundary hedgerows; and there are also two dilapidated buildings to the east of Ryhall Road (A6121) at the eastern end of the site.
- 2.2 The site has a distinct topography, which includes a central valley moving west-to-east through site, following the site's general fall to the east towards the River Gwash.
- 2.3 The site is bound to the south by the existing main built-up area of Stamford, with the boundary predominantly defined by existing residential properties between Little Casterton Road; whilst at the eastern end of the site between Ryhall Road and the River Gwash, the boundary uses are predominately industrial and transport infrastructure uses. The site is bound to the west by Little Casterton Road, beyond which lies Quarry Farm, which falls within the administrative area of Rutland County Council; and to the east the site is bound by the River Gwash. Immediately adjacent to the north-eastern corner of the central part of the site is Borderville Farm; the historic farmhouse is central to a complex of agricultural buildings. Beyond the Farm lies Open Countryside, with the settlement of Little Casterton located approximately 1.16km to the north of the site boundary.
- 2.4 The site forms part of a previously identified cross-boundary allocation for a mixed-use sustainable urban extension to the north of Stamford, comprising of approximately 1,950 dwellings, an east-west link road, local centre, primary school and country park, in conjunction with the land at Quarry Farm, to the west of the application site. However, the Rutland Local Plan 2018-2036 was withdrawn from Examination in 2021, and therefore, the

land falling within Rutland County, which formed part of the proposed development allocation is not formally allocated. It is noted that the Regulation 19 version of the draft Rutland Local Plan 2021-2041 does include Quarry Farm as a draft allocation. Notwithstanding this, it is appreciated that a planning application has been submitted for the Quarry Farm site, which is currently pending consideration by Rutland County Council.

- 2.5 The current application site comprises of the South Kesteven Local Plan allocation site, which is formally allocated within the adopted South Kesteven Local Plan (LP Ref: STM1-H1) and is allocated for the development of approximately 1,300 dwellings, part of the east-west distributor road, a local centre and a primary school, and the provision of contributions towards the expansion or improvement of Stamford Welland Academy to the south. The current application site also includes additional land forming part of the Borderville Sports Centre, used as training pitches, car parking, and a 10m acoustic bund, which was not included within the Local Plan allocation site boundary.
- 2.6 The application site contains four Public Rights of Way (PRoW), which include STAM/5/7, STAM/3/1, STAM/3/2 and STAM/4/1, which traverse the site on a broad north-south alignment. The former Stamford to Essendine railway line, which was disused in 1959, bisects the land to the east of Ryhall Road.
- 2.7 The proposed development site itself does not contain any designated heritage assets (i.e., Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments), and the site is not located within either of the Stamford Conservation Areas. However, it is appreciated that there are a large number of designated assets within the surrounding area, including the high number of listed buildings located within Stamford Town Centre, as well as at Great Casterton, Little Casterton and Belmesthorpe, and Registered Parks and Gardens at Burghley House and Uffington, and Scheduled Ancient Monuments at Great Casterton and Uffington.
- 2.8 The site is predominantly identified as being within Flood Zone 1 of the Flood Map for Planning, with some limited areas of Flood Zone 2 towards the River Gwash at the eastern edge of the site. The surface water flood map indicates that the site is largely identified as being at very low risk of surface water flooding, however, there are areas of lower risk towards the northern boundary of the site, as well as towards the western side of Ryhall Road.
- 2.9 The proposed development site is located within 2km of two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) at Great Casterton Banks and Tolethorpe Road, and the south-eastern corner of the site is also within the Impact Risk Zone of the Barnack Hills and Holes SSSI and SAC.
- 2.10 The site is also located within 1.5km of four County and Local Wildlife Sites including Little Casterton Verge (east and west), Burghley Park and River Welland. In addition, it is appreciated that land within the adjacent Quarry Farm site has also been identified as a candidate Local Wildlife Site.
- 2.11 Approximately 0.57 hectares of the site, forming part of the access arrangements from Little Casterton Road, falls within the administrative area of Rutland County Council.

3 Description of the project

- 3.1 The current application seeks outline planning permission for the erection of up to 1,350 residential units (Use Class C2 and C3); a two-form entry primary school (Use Class F1); local centre (Use Classes E, F2 and public house, wine bar, or drinking establishment; drinking establishment with expanded food provision; and hot food takeaway for the sale of

hot food where consumption is mostly off premises); road between Ryhall Road and Little Casterton Road; removal of existing noise bund; associated green infrastructure, including provision of public open space, landscaping, formal and informal play areas; utilities (including drainage); and associated access, including potential realignment of part of Ryhall Road; ancillary works and structures. The current application has been submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future determination.

- 3.2 The application scheme has been accompanied by an Environmental Statement, which includes chapters in relation to Air Quality, Heritage, Climate Change, Ecology, Ground Conditions, Landscape and Visual Impact, Noise and Vibration, and Transport and Assessment. The application has also been accompanied by a series of technical assessments including Flood Risk Assessment, Lighting Assessment, Phase I and Phase II Ecological Assessment, Noise Assessment and Transport Assessment.
- 3.3 Furthermore, the application submission has also been accompanied by a Stamford North Illustrative Masterplan, which demonstrates how the site would be capable of being developed in a co-ordinated and comprehensive manner alongside the adjacent Quarry Farm application. A Parameters Plan, which is for illustrative purposes only at this stage, but which outlines the extent and nature of the development which has been assessed for the purposes of the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations has also been submitted.
- 3.4 The submitted Parameters Plan indicates that the site would comprise of a single point of access from Little Casterton Road to the west, and Ryhall Road to the east. A limit of deviation between these two points has been identified for the position of the east-west link road; this corridor runs centrally through the site before moving southwards to be positioned to the south of the existing Borderville Sports Centre. An area of deviation is shown for a potential realignment of Ryhall Road, to allow for further consideration of a slight realignment of the existing road eastwards, and subsequent engineering works to address existing topographical challenges. A 'Valley Park' is proposed to run east-west from Little Casterton Road to Ryhall Road following the existing valley landscape, and will incorporate a recreational walking route, SuDS and play areas. The majority of the built form is to be situated between Little Casterton Road and Ryhall Road; with the exception of a small parcel of land immediately abutting Ryhall Road to the east, which is to include residential development. The remaining land to the east of Ryhall Road is indicated as provided informal open space.
- 3.5 The proposed development would involve the removal of 4 existing grass pitches at Borderville Sports Centre, together with an area of parking, to allow for the formation of the Valley Park; a further area to the north and west of the existing Sports Centre is identified for replacement provision and further expansion of activities at Borderville Sports Centre. Immediately to the west of the Sports Centre is the proposed Local Centre, which will include up to 3,000 sq. metres of local centre uses, including Class E, F2 and Sui Generis Uses; the Local Centre is identified to include an area for the provision of a Local Health Centre. A 2 form-entry primary school is proposed to be located to the west of the site, with immediate access from Little Casterton Road.
- 3.6 The proposed built form is identified as being up to 3 storey, with the exception of land immediately adjacent to existing residential properties on the southern boundary, which is to be limited to a maximum of 2-storeys.
- 3.7 Additional points of pedestrian and cycle access are proposed throughout the southern boundary of the site.

3.8 The submitted Stamford North Illustrative Masterplan demonstrates how the scheme could be delivered as part of the wider Stamford North development, which would include the Quarry Farm development situated between Casterton Road and Little Casterton Road. Most notably, this includes the continued provision of the east-west link road that is proposed to run between Casterton Road and Ryhall Road; which includes alignment with the proposed point of access from Little Casterton Road in the south-west corner of the current application site.

3.9 In addition, the application has also been accompanied by a Main Street Design Brief produced jointly on behalf of the current applicant's (GummerLeathes) and the applicant's for the Quarry Farm site (Allison Homes); which sets out a shared design vision for the east-west link road together with the 'Valley Park', with a view to providing a co-ordinated design approach across the administrative areas and application site.

4 Information about the European Site which might be affected

4.1 The application site is located approximately 4.7km to the north-west of Barnack Hills and Holes SSSI, NNR and SAC. Natural England were consulted on the planning application and responded in a letter dated 16 March 2023 (**Appendix 1**). Whilst no objection was raised by Natural England, the consultee response highlighted that the site was located within the impact risk zone and that the proposed development may give rise to significant impacts due to recreational pressures and nutrient deposition.

4.2 The following documents are included at **Appendix 2** to this HRA:

- Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Citation
- Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Conservation Objectives
- Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Conservation Objectives supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features (February 2019).

4.3 Barnack Hills and Holes was designated as a Special Area of Conservation on 1 April 2005. The site is designated as a European site as a result of its semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland habitats, including important orchid sites which have developed on an area of Jurassic Limestone Grassland. These habitats are identified as Annex 1 priority habitats, which are important at the European scale.

4.4 The Conservation Objectives of the SAC are to:

“Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving 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”.*

4.5 The SAC designation covers an area of 23.27 hectares and was historically a stone quarry. The site is managed by Natural England as a National Nature Reserve. The Conservation Objectives supplementary advice notes:

“The site is heavily used by visitors, particularly dog walkers, and there are concerns about the impacts (loss of habitat through an extensive network of heavily used paths, nutrient

enrichment, disturbance etc.). The site is designated open access land under the CROW Act. In order to reduce the impact on a small area, it would be beneficial to restore a significantly sized adjacent area.

Annual average nitrogen and acid deposition are within the critical thresholds for calcareous grassland”.

5 Screening – the Likely Significant Impact Test

- 5.1 The application proposals are for a development which is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of Barnack Hills and Holes SAC (Regulation 61(1)(b) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations). The development is for a residential-led urban extension to the north of the existing main-built up area of Stamford; situated approximately 4.7km to the north-west of the SAC as the crow flies.
- 5.2 South Kesteven District Council has considered whether or not the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on the SAC. In accordance with the relevant Case Law, the authority have adopted a precautionary approach and have not considered any mitigation measures proposed as part of the development. In view of the nature and location of the development, the information from Natural England regarding the management of the site, and identified threats / pressures on its qualifying features, the following potential effects have been identified:
- (a) Increased nutrient or acid deposition as a result of traffic travelling to and from the development site.
 - (b) Increased recreational pressures as a result of the occupants of the proposed development visiting the SAC.
- 5.3 This screening stage considers whether these potential effects constitute a “likely significant effect” on the SAC under regulation 63(1) of the Habitat Regulations.

Nutrient or Acid Deposition

- 5.4 The latest Transport Assessment Addendum (Stantec) (Dated March 2024), which was updated to include the results of the new Stamford Transport Model (STM) that has been specifically developed by Lincolnshire County Council to assess the impact of developments in Stamford, assesses the potential impact of the development based on a variety of scenarios; this includes without development, with the individual Stamford North applications, or with the totality of the Stamford North development.
- 5.5 In the context of the above, the submitted Transport Assessment indicates that the proposed development would result in 30 additional vehicle trips on Barnack Road in the AM peak and 22 additional two-way trips in the PM peak; the vast majority of development flow traffic would be heading east-west from the development towards the A1 strategic road network.
- 5.6 In respect of the above, it is noted that Natural England have not indicated any concerns / objections in relation to nitrate deposition at any European site, but rather they have expressed concerns about the impact on the Great Casterton Road Banks SSSI and Tolethorpe Verges SSSI. Notwithstanding this, the submitted Environmental Statement has considered the potential impact of the development on the SSSIs and has concluded that due to their distance from the site, direct effects are highly unlikely to occur.
- 5.7 Taking the above into account, it is concluded that the proposed development is not likely to have a significant effect on Barnack Hills and Holes SAC as a result of atmospheric

nutrient or acid deposition from traffic, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Recreational Pressures

- 5.8 It is noted that the submitted Environmental Statement concludes that the proposed development is not likely to have a significant effect on the SAC alone, due to the intervening distance and features.
- 5.9 However, South Kesteven District Council considers that there would be some increase in visitors to the Barnack Hills and Holes SAC as a result of the development unless mitigation measures are taken. Natural England has identified the SAC as being at high risk from further increases in recreational pressure. It is accepted that it is difficult to accurately forecast the number of additional visits that are likely to occur as a result of the development; however, the fact that the number of additional visits arising from the development site may be relatively small in the context of the much wider population within closer proximity to the SAC, does not mean that these additional visits would not have any effect on the SAC.
- 5.10 The submitted Environmental Statement indicates that the inherent mitigation of the development, namely the substantial over-provision of informal open space including the proposed “Gwash Meadows” and the absence of any built development within the IRZ for the SAC, would mitigate any impacts on ecological assets as a result of recreational pressures.
- 5.11 However, at this screening stage, only intrinsic features of the development can be taken into account. Mitigation measures to reduce or avoid potential impacts on the SAC cannot be taken into account, and a precautionary approach is required. The application has been submitted in outline form, with all matters reserved for later approval. As such, the aforementioned mitigation measures would need to be detailed and secured by way of planning conditions, legal agreements or other similar measures. Consequently, whilst the substantial overprovision of informal open space as part of the development, and the absence of built development within the IRZ are shown on the submitted Parameters Plans accompanying the application, South Kesteven District Council concludes that these matters are not inherent to the development of the site, and therefore, should be treated as mitigation measures. As such, these measures are not taken into account at this screening stage.
- 5.12 Taking the above into account, it is concluded that the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on Barnack Hills and Holes through increased recreational pressure. Therefore, in accordance with Regulation 63(1) of the Habitat Regulations it is necessary to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the development in light of the conservation objectives for the SAC.

6 Consultation

- 6.1 As required by Regulation 63(3), as part of the Appropriate Assessment process, South Kesteven District Council has consulted with Natural England. In addition, consultation has been carried out with Barnack Parish Council, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust.
- 6.2 A draft version of this document was supplied for comment, including the appendices. The draft Habitat Regulations Assessment included information relating to mitigation measures, which have been proposed as part of the application and considered by the District Council. These measures are discussed in Section 7 of this report.

Natural England

A copy of their formal comments is contained in **Appendix 3**.

- 6.3 *We welcome the draft Habitats Regulations Assessment and note it adequately assess impacts from recreational disturbance to the SAC at the outline stage alone and in-combination. As noted in the dHRA, significant greenspace is included in the Illustrative Masterplan design and can potentially provide a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) for new, local residents. The scale outlined is in line with guidance published by Natural England for the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area (SPA) SANG.*
- 6.4 *As noted in the dHRA, it is not easy to quantify additional visitors from the proposed development to the SAC within the HRA. As such, a Recreational Impact Assessment (RIA) is required to assess the proposed development's impacts from recreational disturbance to the SAC. This should then inform the full HRA.*
- 6.5 *The RIA should also be used to inform the final design of the SANG to ensure it is fit for purpose for the local residents and their needs.*
- 6.6 *Our comments regarding air quality impacts to Great Casterton Banks SSSI and Tolethorpe Road Verges SSSI have been addressed within the dHRA and we consider no further assessment or action is required in regard to air quality impacts at the SSSIs.*

Barnack Parish Council

- 6.7 No comments received.

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

- 6.8 No comments received.

7 Mitigation Measures

Effect on the SAC – No Mitigation

- 7.1 As discussed above, if an appropriate assessment is required, it must be carried out in accordance with the precautionary principles. In this regard, it is difficult to forecast the likely increase in visits to the SAC by residents of the proposed development and, therefore, it is difficult to predict the potential impact of the increase in visits on the SAC.
- 7.2 However, it is understood that the SAC is:
- Sensitive to and at risk from recreational pressures; and
 - At or close to carrying capacity.
- 7.3 In this respect, it is likely that some people living at the proposed development site could be expected to visit Barnack Hills and Holes for recreation. Any net increase in visitors due to the development may have an adverse impact on the SAC qualifying features, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. Unless measures to reduce or avoid adverse impacts on the SAC are secured, it cannot be ascertained that there would not be an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC. Therefore, mitigation is required.

Measures to reduce or avoid adverse effects on the SAC

- 7.4 In order to ascertain no adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, all reasonable doubt should be removed, otherwise planning permission should not be granted. Any measures deemed necessary to reduce or avoid adverse impacts on the SAC must have a high degree of certainty as to their effectiveness and delivery.

- 7.5 One approach to mitigation is to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). The provision of SANG is supported in principle by Natural England to address potential harmful impacts on valuable nature conservation resources, including European sites.
- 7.6 The role of SANG is to divert visitors from visiting a European site and as a result, in this case preventing an increase in recreational pressure on the SAC. The effectiveness of SANG as mitigation will depend upon its location, type and quality; it should be suitable, natural and accessible as far as possible. Ultimately, SANG should be more attractive than the SAC to the population who are currently likely to visit the SAC. A number of mitigation measures are proposed, as set out below.

SANG within the development site

- 7.7 As alluded to above, the submitted Parameters Plan and associated Illustrative Masterplan indicates that the proposed built-form situated between Little Casterton Road and Ryhall Road is to be permeated by an east-west green space; referred to as Valley Park; and an extensive area of informal open space is to be provided to the east of Ryhall Road between the proposed built-form and the River Gwash; this area is referred to as the Gwash Meadows. The submitted application details indicate that the "Gwash Meadows" area is to provide a significant resource for public use, whilst bring forward exemplar standards of landscape and nature restoration. In this regard, the development would be required, by the Policy OS1 of the Council's adopted Local Plan to provide 11.9 hectares of open space for the indicative 3,132 new residents of the development; the submitted proposals are designed to provide approximately 33 hectares of accessible green space, thus substantially exceeding the requirements of the adopted Local Plan and the Natural England guidance.
- 7.8 In this respect, it is anticipated that the proposed development would provide SANG to ensure that a large proportion of future residents of the site would remain within the site for recreational activities rather than travel to the SAC; but also that the proposed development would attract visitors who are currently accessing the SAC for recreational purposes. As such, it is suggested that the proposed development would result in no net increase in recreational visits to the SAC.
- 7.9 The delivery of this SANG can be secured by way of planning conditions which require the future development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted Parameters Plan and Illustrative Masterplan.
- 7.10 In addition, in line with the consultation response received from Natural England to the dHRA, a Recreational Impact Assessment will be required as part of any reserved matters application relating to the open space identified as forming the SANG on the parameters plan. This will allow the results of the RIA to inform the design of the SANG and ensure that it is fit for purpose and appropriately mitigates the impact on the SAC. This can be secured by way of planning conditions.

SANG within neighbouring development – Quarry Farm

- 7.11 As detailed previously, the current application site forms part of the proposed Stamford North development, which includes the land at Quarry Farm, immediately to the west of the site, which is located within Rutland County Council's administrative area. An application for the development of the Quarry Farm as part of the wider Stamford North scheme has been submitted to Rutland County Council and is currently pending consideration. Whilst the Quarry Farm development, and the current development site are subject to separate planning applications, these developments are inherently linked and interdependent on

each other through the requirement to deliver an east-west link road between Casterton Road and Ryhall Road. As such, these developments cannot be brought forward in isolation and the delivery of the Quarry Farm development can be attributed a high degree of certainty as part of this Appropriate Assessment.

- 7.12 The Quarry Farm application (RCC Ref: 2022/0227MAO) is an outline application for residential development (up to 650 dwellings), a local centre (up to 3,000 sq. metres of gross floorspace for uses within Class E, and F2), open space including country park, access drainage and landscaping. The application has been submitted in outline with all matters reserved for future determination except for access. The application has been accompanied by a Parameters Plan, together with an Illustrative Layout, which reflects the Illustrative Masterplan that accompanies the current application scheme. The submitted plans indicate that an area of 35 hectares of land to the north of, and including, the retained woodland would be developed to provide a Country Park. The application has been accompanied by a Country Park Concept document, which outlines the high-level proposals for the Park based on design principles relating to habitats and recreational visitors; these principles form part of an overall vision of creation an assess that provides a high quality recreational resources together with providing significant opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.
- 7.13 As detailed above, the Country Park is identified on the submitted Parameters Plan and, therefore, would be secured through planning conditions requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the submitted plan. In addition, the two applications are subject to a Joint Infrastructure Planning Agreement, which secures the relevant joint infrastructure obligations, including the delivery of the link road. As such, these mitigation measures can be attributed a high-level of certainty.

SANG in the local area – Burghley Parkland

- 7.14 In addition, people living at the site would have access to Burghley Park to the south of the site, which is located in closer proximity than the SAC. Whilst the current application has been submitted in outline and, therefore, the detailed proposals for the Gwash Meadows are subject to subsequent approval, it is noted that this area is proposed to include retained use of the existing public right of way than runs adjacent to the River Gwash. This PRow would link to an existing network of pedestrian routes which are to be upgraded as part of the committed development schemes on Uffington Road and at St. Martin's Park, to the south of the site, thus providing a more accessible connection to the Burghley Parkland.
- 7.15 The parkland offers a type of recreational experience which is different from that at Barnack Hills and Holes; notably, it is understood that dogs are not allowed off-lead because it is a deer park. Nonetheless, this asset has the potential to divert some of the visits that residents of the development might otherwise make to the SAC.

8 Appropriate Assessment

Screening – the likely significant effect test

- 8.1 As set out above, South Kesteven District Council has concluded that the development:
- Is not connected with or necessary for the management of the SAC
 - Is likely to have a significant effect on the Barnack Hills and Holes SAC in the absence of measures to reduce or avoid the impact of increase in recreational pressures on the designated site.

- Should be subject to an appropriate assessment of its implications for the SAC, in light of the designated site's conservation objectives.

Appropriate Assessment

- 8.2 As discussed, South Kesteven District Council has concluded that, on a precautionary basis, in the absence of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce impacts arising from increased recreational pressures, it cannot be confirmed that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC.
- 8.3 It is difficult to forecast the level of any potential increase in the recreational pressure on the SAC that might occur as a result of the proposed development. Nonetheless, the scale and variety of SANG proposed by the applicants, in the form of on-site formal and informal open space, would be substantial in the context of Natural England's guidance for a development of this size, and the Council's Local Plan policy obligations.
- 8.4 In addition, it is noted that further SANG, in the form of a new Country Park, would be delivered as part of the adjacent Quarry Farm development, which is intrinsically linked to the current application site through the completion of a Joint Infrastructure Planning Agreement.
- 8.5 Whilst the type of recreational experience provided by the SANG is likely to be different from that at the SAC, it is Officers' assessment that the SANG proposals would provide a variety of formal and informal/semi-natural greenspace, which includes open land with the opportunity to let dogs off lead that would assist in meeting a variety of recreational needs of the occupants of the development site.
- 8.6 It is also important to note that the SANG would be available to the wider public, as well as residents of the proposed development scheme. It is acknowledged that the Council's Open Space, Sports and Recreation Study (February 2024) identifies that Stamford has poor access to natural and semi-natural greenspace, and that the southern part of Stamford in particular has no access to amenity greenspace. The SANG measures would help to meet this wider need and deliver the objectives of the Stamford Green Wheel, with the potential to divert some existing visits away from the Barnack Hills and Holes and towards locations which are closer and more conveniently accessible to the population of the town.
- 8.7 Given the scale and extent of the SANG, and the opportunities it offers to both the residents of the proposed development and the wider community, it is considered likely that an overall, net decrease in visits to the SAC would result.
- 8.8 These mitigation measures can be appropriately secured and delivered using planning conditions and obligations.
- 8.9 In view of the above, on a precautionary basis, it is concluded beyond reasonable doubt that the package of mitigation measures would ensure that the development would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Barnack Hills and Holes SAC. In light of a net reduction in visits being anticipated, there is no requirement to undertake an assessment of the effect of the development in combination with other plans and projects in the area.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Natural England consultation response dated 16 March 2023

Appendix 2 – Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Citation

- **Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Conservation Objectives**
- **Barnack Hills and Holes SAC Conservation Objectives Supplementary Advice**

Appendix 3 – Natural England consultation response date 07 November 2024

