

Mr Robert Mellor  
c/o Programme Officer  
Louise St John Howe  
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PO Box 109656  
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SUFFOLK.

14 June 2017  
By email,

Dear Mr Mellor

### Habitats Regulation Assessment

Thank you for the letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> June from the Programme Officer in regard to Habitats Regulation Assessment, referenced as Examination Document ED 147.

Considering the representation made by Natural England in regard to the North Downs Woodland SAC, and the commitment sought *"to ensure funding continues at an appropriate level to ensure existing management measures at North Downs Woodlands SAC are suitably maintained (such as fencing, gateways etc and entrance points) thus ensuring existing and future levels of residential development do not result in likely significant effects upon the North Downs Woodlands SAC as a result of increased recreational pressure"* the Council can confirm that it has measures in place to address these matters.

The entire area is a designated Local Nature Reserve, with an active Management Committee (currently chaired by an elected Maidstone Councillor). The Council provides administrative support and officer representation as well as legal advice to the Management Committee. There is an adopted Management Plan for the designated Local Nature Reserve and this is regularly reviewed by the Committee; a copy can be provided if required.

The Management Committee, supported by the Council and the Kent Downs AONB Unit, are able to make bids for funding to support initiatives such as those identified by Natural England. In this regard Natural England is also represented on the Management Committee and this ensures a coordinated approach to the management of both the LNR and SAC.

There have been issues associated with the misuse of the area and the Council believes it has a strong track record of working with all parties to address these. Historically the Council successfully fought a public inquiry to change the status of the associated byway within the site to prevent vehicular access given that this was being used in ways that were damaging to the environment. The measures that were implemented now provide an improved environment, including for pedestrians and equestrian users, and facilitate access to the SAC for educational purposes, whilst concurrently seeking to prevent anti-social behaviour that has been problematic in the past.

There is no reason that the proactive approach to management of this area will not continue. However in addition and to further safeguard this valued landscape the Council has produced and adopted a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (GBIS) (Evidence Document ENV 017) that supports the Local Plan. Certain commitments are included in the Delivery Framework at Appendix 1 as Strategic Objectives, centred on the identified themes and key issues. Those most relevant to the representation of Natural England are set out in the table below.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Key Issues</i>	<i>Strategic Objectives</i>
<i>Integrating sustainable movement and access for all</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Fragmented Rights of Way</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Proactively seek opportunities to enhance sustainable and safe connections to key destinations and the countryside by working with partners to improve sustainable access by footpaths, riverside walks, cycle ways and bridleways.</i></li> </ul>
<i>Promoting a distinctive townscape and landscape</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Heritage landscapes such as Ancient Woodland and traditional orchards vulnerable to damage and loss</i></li> <li><i>Abandonment of traditional woodland management such as coppicing and pollarding and planting of non-native trees</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Conserve and enhance valued open spaces, heritage and tree cover and create new high quality, well linked green spaces to serve new development</i></li> <li><i>Conserve and enhance the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and its setting, maintain landscapes of local value and restore and improve sensitive landscape in the poorest condition.</i></li> </ul>
<i>Retaining and enhancing a quality environment for investment and through development'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Pressure on the landscape and vulnerable habitats</i></li> <li><i>Potential loss of local landscape and historic character and coalescence of settlements</i></li> <li><i>Lack of recreational space for new populations</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Provide a high quality environment and development standards which form the benchmark for new, high quality, well planned developments with sufficient well integrated, high quality green spaces.</i></li> </ul>

The Council is also commencing work on an Action Plan that will draw on the key issues and strategic objectives of the GBIS and Delivery Framework to provide a schedule of more detailed projects for taking forward by both the Council itself and with partner agencies. The Action Plan will seek to mitigate the key issues identified in the GBIS and the impacts of increased levels of development in the borough resulting from the Local Plan proposals. Once complete the Action Plan will be presented to the Council's Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee for agreement and will be used to assist in the securing of developer contributions and other sources of funding where appropriate to deliver the identified projects and actions and where possible to influence the future actions and projects of third party agencies. The Council hopes that this demonstrates a comprehensive and holistic approach to the management of this sensitive area that addresses Natural England's comments.

Yours sincerely

*R. L. Jarman*

**Rob Jarman**

Head of Planning and Development

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