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Contact: Bernie Fleming
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Date: 26 June 2026

Dear Ben,

[26/01256/SO](#)

EIA Screening Request

Land off Claybush Road, Ashwell, Hertfordshire

ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall Recommendation

- ☒ Application can be determined with no ecological objections

Summary

- Conclusion (no EIA required) broadly agreed
- The ecological baseline is poorly evidenced
- Over-reliance on future surveys/mitigation
- PEA would have materially strengthened screening
- Natural England has identified potential effects on Ashwell Springs SSSI
- Future application likely to require PEA and EclA

Supporting documents

I have made particular use of the following document in providing this advice:

- Screening Opinion Statement (April 2026) Carter Jonas

Comments

Thank you for your letter of 26 May 2026 which refers, and for consulting Herts LEADS (Ecology).

With the exception of Ashwell Springs SSSI (see below), the Hertfordshire Environmental Record Centre (HERC) has no records of notable habitats or species either within the proposed development site or on land nearby that would appear to be directly at risk from the proposed development as currently described or where potential impacts could not be mitigated

Accordingly, having reviewed the submitted Screening Opinion, I broadly agree that the proposed development is unlikely to give rise to likely significant environmental effects such as to require EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment). However, the ecological justification provided for this conclusion is limited.

For instance, the submission does not present a meaningful ecological baseline, instead relying on general statements and deferring assessment to a future Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). A proportionate desk-based review, including reference to available biological records (eg HERC), would have strengthened the assessment and provided a clearer justification for ruling out significant effects. In this respect, a PEA could very usefully have informed the Screening Opinion.

Further, the number of known or suspected bat roosts nearby suggest the proposed development site may play a role in the maintenance of the conservation status of these populations. If so, this may influence the design of the proposed development. All, however, remains unknown at present.

On this matter, as the applicant/agent will be aware, PEAs only scope potential issues and a subsequent more thorough Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) incorporating any necessary species surveys (including bats), appropriate mitigation and evidence that the mitigation hierarchy has been followed will be required to accompany any planning application.

Notwithstanding the above, **in the absence of non-statutory designated ecological sites in close proximity to the site, and given the type and scale of development proposed, the overall conclusion of the Screening Opinion Statement is acceptable.**

In saying this, I note that Natural England has identified the potential for significant effects on Ashwell Springs SSSI. Whilst this matter falls within Natural England's remit, it reinforces the opinion that the screening has been superficial, something that must be addressed by the proposed Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA).

Yours sincerely,

Bernie Fleming

Ecology Advisor

Hertfordshire LEADS

Hertfordshire LEADS provides Landscape, Ecology, Archaeology, Design and Sustainability support to planning departments in Hertfordshire.