

Date: 06 August 2025
Our ref: 519994
Your ref: 25/01539/FP



North Hertfordshire District Council

planning.control@north-herts.gov.uk

Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning consultation: Extension and conversion of the existing barn into a five bedroom dwelling with associated landscaping, following demolition of non-original stable extension, car port and lean-to structure

Location: Holborn Farm, Dane End, Therfield, Royston, Hertfordshire, SG8 9RH

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 17 July 2025 which was received by Natural England on 17 July 2025

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 Therfield Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) has been notified.

This application falls within the 5.8km zone of influence (Zol) for recreational pressure impacts to Therfield Heath SSSI/LNR and will therefore be expected to deliver a package of mitigation measures and/or financial contributions in accordance with North Hertfordshire Council's Therfield Heath SSSI Mitigation Strategy. Mitigation measures will need to be agreed with Natural England, the Conservators of Therfield Heath and Greens and the LPA and their delivery secured through an appropriate planning mechanism.

Natural England will be pleased to advise on the preparation of a draft mitigation plan through our Discretionary Advice Service (DAS).

Recreational Disturbance to Therfield Heath SSSI/LNR

Therfield Heath is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). It is nationally designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), regarded to be of international importance for its Chalk Grassland Habitats and presence of Chalkhill Blue butterfly *Lysandra coridon*. The interest features of these habitats are vulnerable to recreational impacts and within recent years there has been increasing concern

regarding the significant increases in visitor numbers, linked to nearby residential development. Natural England and the Conservators of Therfield Heath and Greens have highlighted that current number of visitors appears to be exceeding the carrying capacity of the SSSI /LNR. Further pressure associated with new residential development could cause additional damage to already impacted SSSI features, such as Chalk grassland, which is experiencing detrimental soil nutrient balance impact arising from dog littering.

Prompted by the above concerns Natural England commissioned Footprint Ecology to undertake a Visitor Access Study to identify the range and level of visitor use at Therfield Heath SSSI, in relation to the nature conservation interest, and to make recommendations relating to the management of access at the site. The Study has identified that the majority (75%) of regular visitors to the SSSI travel from within a 5.8km radius of the site; 50% of visitors originate from within 2km of the SSSI. It confirms that new residential development within close proximity to Therfield Heath SSSI is likely to contribute additional visitor pressure which could have a significant adverse effect on notified features. The Study recommends a number of mitigation measures to help address these adverse impacts.

North Hertfordshire Council has used the findings and recommendations of the Footprint Ecology Study to prepare a [Therfield Heath SSSI Mitigation Strategy](#). The Strategy sets out measures that will be used to manage the additional recreational impact of new housing development, including Local Plan allocations, on Therfield Heath SSSI. It identifies a 2km inner Zone of Influence (Zol) and 5.8km wider Zol around the SSSI based upon the findings of the Footprint Ecology visitor survey. The Strategy sets out mitigation principles that new housing development is expected to apply to limit additional pressure on the SSSI, differentiating between housing development with the inner and outer Zols, and also larger housing developments beyond the Zol where evidence clearly indicates that development could adversely impact the SSSI. The Strategy will enable the Council to require that relevant new housing development within (and potentially beyond the Zol) provides appropriate mitigation and / or proportionate financial contributions towards delivery of SSSI access management measures, to protect and enhance the resilience of the SSSI and ensure that development is sustainable.

Natural England's Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) have been amended to reflect the 5.8km Zol for recreational pressure effects on Therfield Heath SSSI. These can be used to ensure that planning applications for 'relevant housing development' are accompanied by a robust assessment of the effects of recreational pressure and a package of mitigation measures to address adverse impacts, in line with the measures set out in the Therfield Heath Mitigation Strategy.

The current application falls within the 5.8km Zol for Therfield Heath SSSI/LNR and is therefore required to assess and mitigate any adverse recreational pressure impacts on the SSSI in accordance with the North Hertfordshire Council Therfield Heath SSSI Mitigation Strategy, as described above. We would expect mitigation measures, or financial contributions, to be proportionate to those already provided for similar new residential development. The measures should be designed in consultation with the Conservators of Therfield Heath and Greens, Natural England and the LPA and their delivery secured through an appropriate planning mechanism.

Natural England advises that permission should not be granted until such time as these mitigation measures have been assessed and secured through the appropriate means. We will be pleased to discuss the applicant's draft assessment and mitigation proposals through Natural England's [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

Please note that if your authority is minded to grant planning permission contrary to the advice in this letter, you are required under Section 281 (6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to notify Natural England of the permission, the terms on which it is proposed to grant it and how, if at all, your authority has taken account of Natural England's advice. You must also allow a further period of 21 days before the operation can commence.

Site of Special Scientific Interest Impact Risk zones

The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

requires local planning authorities to consult Natural England on “Development in or likely to affect a Site of Special Scientific Interest” (Schedule 4, w). Our SSSI Impact Risk Zones are a GIS dataset designed to be used during the planning application validation process to help local planning authorities decide when to consult Natural England on developments likely to affect a SSSI. The dataset and user guidance can be accessed from the data.gov.uk website

Further general advice on the consideration of protected species and other natural environment issues is provided at Annex A.

This concludes Natural England’s advice at this stage which we hope you will find helpful.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Please consult us again once the information requested above, has been provided.

Yours faithfully

Teena Lawrence
Consultations Team