



**Hampshire &
Isle of Wight**

Mr J Owen
Planning Service: Development Control
Test Valley Borough Council
Beech Hurst
Weyhill Road
Andover
SP10 3AJ

28 November 2007

Your Ref: 07/01951/OUTN

Our Ref: 13.34.3 CRM

Dear Jason

07/01951/OUTN: Business park and associated works at former Andover Airfield, Monxton Road, Andover – AMENDED PLANS

Thank you for consulting the Trust on the amended plans to the above planning application, and for extending the deadline for comments on these plans.

As you may be aware, the Senior Planning Officer, Dr Pauline Holmes, and I visited the application site with Dr Katy Read of Middlemarch Environmental Ltd, and Paul Heslop of Goodman International, in early October. At this time, we walked over much of the application site, and in particular the agriculturally unimproved grassland areas.

It is the opinion of the officers of this Trust that with correct management, the grassland on the sites of the proposed hotel and unit 5 would potentially meet the criteria for designation as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). It was evident from that visit that although the grassland has declined due to poor management, unimproved grassland species were still present, and through the implementation of a suitable management scheme this grassland could be restored to a good condition and a valuable habitat. The amended proposals with respect to the grassland still involve the translocation of a small proportion of the total unimproved grassland on site, with the loss of the greater remainder, and no offer of off-site mitigation for this loss. The revised proposals also show the further fragmentation of the grassland along the new 'organic' western boundary, with the addition of standards scattered across the grassland. This will fundamentally alter the nature of the grassland, and cannot be considered a suitable alternative. As such, the Trust **maintains the objection** to the loss of the unimproved grassland. If the whole of the grassland cannot be retained and managed in situ, the Trust would strongly urge the Council to seek off-site mitigation from the developers.

The Council is reminded that unimproved chalk grassland is a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitat of local and national importance. The Hampshire BAP states that this grassland type is of key importance for 50 priority species, including the Red Listed skylark, known to use the application site for nesting (see Environmental Statement and my letter of 21 August 2007). Over the last 150 years, 98% of Hampshire's chalk grassland has been lost, and one of the main objectives of the Hampshire BAP is to 'ensure no further loss or degradation of lowland calcareous grassland'. This, combined with other Hampshire BAP objectives to increase the extent, and improve the quality of such grassland should be fully taken into account when determining this application.

The Trust has one query regarding the SINC's noted on page 115 of the amended ES, para. 11.58. This section describes two SINC's, one of which being 1.2 km south-east of the application site. The ES states that this SINC is designated for 'agriculturally improved grassland'. If this relates to the SINC at the A303/A343 Junction, this has in fact been designated for agriculturally un-improved grassland and also for supporting notable species.

Overall, the amendments to this application do not take into consideration the objections and concerns raised in my letter of 21 August 2007. As such, the Trust maintains its objection to this application on the grounds detailed in both this and the previous letter. However, if the developer wishes to look at the potential for off-site mitigation, the Trust would be happy to discuss this.

If you wish to discuss these matters further, then please do not hesitate to do so. I also ask that you keep the Trust informed of the progress and outcome of this application.

Yours sincerely

C Rankin-Moore

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