

Our Ref: 784-B028538

Your Ref: PP-10060190

Chief Planning Officer
Planning Services
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 3HD

23rd July 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

Land at Latchetts Mead, Green Lane, Chobham, GU24 8PH

Please find enclosed a planning application for change of use of land to provide a SANG extension to Chobham Meadow on land at a site known as Latchetts Mead in Chobham. The application is submitted on behalf of our Client William Lacey Group Ltd.

The applicant wishes to bring this land forward as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) as an extension to the existing Sang in Chobham.

This proposal follows a detailed pre-application response with Natural England and the Council. The comments made have been addressed as detailed in this letter and shown on the proposed plans. The remainder of this letter demonstrates that the proposed development should be approved, complying with all material planning considerations.

Documents submitted with this application

1. The completed application form;
2. This Planning, Design and Access Statement;
3. Flood Risk Assessment by Tetra Tech;
4. Ecological Appraisal by Tetra Tech;
5. Site Location Plan LM001;
6. Block Plan (dwg. no. A102550 Fig 2 Rev A);
7. Context Plan – Existing SANG footpaths;
8. Latchetts Mead Topographical Survey by Tecnics
9. Tree Report by Mark Welby;
10. Assessment for SANG Acceptability Report by WYG
11. Natural England Request for Discretionary Advice Service
12. Natural England response dated 23.04.18

The site and surroundings

The site adjoins the defined settlement area of Chobham. It is approximately 1ha in size. It is greenfield with areas of open ground and trees. It is bound by Mill Bourne Brook and grassland fields to the south, housing and gardens to the west and north, and grassland fields with tree lines and hedgerows to the east.

An existing SANG, Chobham Water Meadows, is located immediately adjacent to the site (east and south).

This is a Council owned SANG, created to mitigate for adverse effects on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA from the impact of permitted new dwellings within the relevant catchment. The water meadows are approximately 23.5ha in size, with many natural paths and its own 2.5km circular route along the banks of the River Bourne.

Proposal

The application proposal is to bring the site forward as a SANG extension to Chobham Water Meadows. Which will contain its own walkway that is intended to connect through to the existing walking routes within the SANG.

Potential connecting points are to the east and to the south east which could connect to the public right of way running parallel and just beyond the southern boundary.

The site itself whilst not large enough to contain a large walking route could provide an additional area of footpath approximately 0.5km in length. The treed nature of the site means that it would provide a different experience to the current users of the SANG, which is considered beneficial in increasing the attraction of the site.

At this stage the format of the path has not been decided. It is proposed to be a natural route with minimal vegetation cutback or be slightly more formalised mown route. It is not envisaged at this stage that the route would be a formal hoggin path or boardwalk.

The scheme does not propose a car park or any additional buildings as part of the design, as visitors by car would use the existing Chobham Meadow facilities.

The applicant's current intention is to retain the SANG in private ownership, with SANG payments going to them when the site is released for housing and the SAMM payments going to the Council in the usual way.

Given the applicant is also a developer of housing there is potential for the site to be retained by them to off-set sites they might bring forward themselves within the catchment area. The potential mechanism for ongoing management under this route would relate to the management company associated with the new houses maintaining it, if sufficient numbers, or contributing to a proportion of the management of the SANG. The payment would be secured as part of the ground maintenance payments associated with each property.

However, it is understood following the pre-application meeting that the Council's preferred route would be to secure ownership of the extension. It is expected that these matters would be addressed during the s106 negotiations.

Based on an assessment of the Surrey Heath Borough Council Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance Strategy SPD (Jan 2012) at 1ha the site is considered capable of providing mitigation for 50 dwellings.

An alternative calculation utilising the 8ha per 1000 population Fields in Trust open space standard indicates that a new 20ha SANG could provide recreation space for up to 2500 people. Using the same ratio, a 1ha site will provide open space for 125 people. Taking a dwelling occupancy average of 2.48 people per dwelling, the 125 person figure equates to 50 dwellings, rounded down.

Planning Policy

The adopted Development Plan for Surrey Heath Borough (Core Strategy and Development Management Policies DPD 2012) shows the site as located within the Green Belt designation.

Its incorporation as a SANG is not considered to negatively impact on the openness of the Green Belt particularly as no car park or building works are associated with the scheme.

Notwithstanding this, use of the land for leisure purposes is accepted as being appropriate development within the Green Belt under paragraph 149 of the revised NPPF (July 2021). The second bullet point states exceptions to inappropriate development include, *“provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.”*

Land at Latchetts Mead has been submitted for consideration to various Call for Sites and SLAA consultations as being potentially suitable for housing and or SANG. The last available Policy assessment summary of the development potential of the site in 2017 commented on two fronts, one as SANG and one as a possible rural exception *“Capacity is somewhat limited due to heavy tree coverage and low surrounding densities at the edge of the settlement area (approx. 12dph). The capacity could potentially increase if it can be demonstrated that flooding issues are possible to overcome”* and *“Possible SANG...extension to Chobham Meadows SANG.”*

It is noted that of the 7 SANG sites currently listed on the Council’s Website, 5 of them are either full or of limited capacity. Capacity exists at Chobham Meadow, but this will also be diminishing. It is therefore considered that this extension should be supported to help address the current shortfall. Below is an extract of the webpage showing the current situation:

Name of SANG	Capacity Status
Blackwater Park	Full
Chobham Place Woods	Full
Windlemere	Capacity Available
Chobham Meadows	Capacity Available
Hawley Meadows	Very Limited Capacity available
Shepherd Meadows	Limited Capacity available
Swan Lakes	Full

Principle of Development

The site is greenfield land with trees on a large proportion. It is currently unmanaged and would benefit from the works associated with bringing it forward for use as a SANG.

Previous assessments of sites that might be considered possible future SANGS by the Council, have been indicated as being potentially acceptable to the LPA subject to its suitability being assessed by Natural England (NE).

Tetra Tech (formerly WYG) has therefore undertaken an Ecology Assessment for SANG suitability on the site and submitted the findings to the NE formal request for discretionary advice service. A representative of NE visited the site with Tetra Tech and a representative from the Applicant and assessed its suitability.

Subsequent correspondence from NE confirmed the following:

“ Below is a summary of our meeting:

- This 1ha wooded area will be a ‘bolt on’ (an addition) to Chobham Water Meadows SANG
- Natural England is satisfied that this wooded area will be an enhancement to the existing SANG and will provide a longer walk than is currently available
- The woodland area helps to provide the SANG with a variety of habitats
- This area will be an acceptable ‘bolt on’ as long as the path from the main SANG joins onto a path (at both ends) through the wooded area
- The path itself in the wooded area does not need to be at least 2.3km long as it will be an extension to the existing path which already meets the criteria
- This wooded area will remain very much the same with the exception of a path and some minor tree work. Therefore we do not expect that planning permission will be required as there is no ‘change of use’. Please refer to the Local Authority for confirmation.
- The wooded area will be managed in perpetuity either by Surrey Heath (first choice as they manage the rest of the SANG) or by a charity (William Lacey Group to negotiate this).“

Leaving aside the comments on management and the correct planning process, the above confirms that NE consider the site to be suitable as a potential SANG extension.

As such it is considered that the LPA should also consider it acceptable, subject to securing the appropriate mechanisms for bringing it forward.

Design

Drawing A102550 Fig 2 Rev A shows an indicative footpath, which would be set to meander through the woodland. The position of the path would be dictated by doing the least amount of works possible i.e. avoiding significant trees, shrubs and any items of ecological value.

As indicated above, at this stage the make-up of the path is not fixed but is expected to be as natural as possible.

No car park or buildings are proposed under the scheme, instead it would build on the existing SANG provision.

Two access points to the new area are shown on the drawing, which will be located to take advantage of existing SANG paths and public rights of way.

Signage as necessary would be provided to enhance the users experience of the new space. Further details are provided on this within the Ecological Appraisal (July 2021) in Section 5.4.

There is an area of land on the other side of a wet ditch in the north east corner of the site, which will be included as part of the SANG but not connected to the footpath. This will still be available for exploration as required.

The exact route and formal design of the footpath including any potential raised areas is proposed to be left to the planning condition stage, as is the submission of any Maintenance and Management plan of this extension to the Chobham SANG.

This is because the Council has indicated at pre-application stage that whilst they are supportive of the idea of including this land as part of the existing Chobham SANG, they would wish ultimately to obtain ownership of the land.

That being the case leaving details to be determined via planning condition would provide the Council the necessary flexibility to design their own scheme.

To assist in this the applicant has provided a detailed Topographical Survey, Ecological and Arboricultural Report.

Environmental Issues

It is envisaged that the site would become part of the existing management regime of Chobham Meadows irrespective of whether the applicant or Council own the site.

The applicant has had a number of surveys done of the site in order to confirm with Natural England that it is suitable as an extension, which was a specific assessment. These documents are included as part of the submission.

A fully assessed Phase 1 walkover survey has also been undertaken this season and the findings detailed in an updated report, with the benefit of the arboricultural information. The report makes recommendations on biodiversity enhancements and ecological management. No harm to any protected species is envisaged provided the recommendations are adhered to.

The arboricultural report provides details of all the trees, age, spread etc which has been considered within the ecology report. It notes that most of the internal trees are of limited individual value. The value and amenity comes more from the overall value of the woodland.

It is clear that a footpath can be provided through the trees with minimal intervention on the site, which would benefit from maintenance to remove the invasive species and enable the superior specimens to flourish, which would be achieved as part of this application.

Highways

The proposal does not include parking or any vehicle access, as the intention is to make use of the existing facilities east of the site.

Therefore no highway issues arise as a result of the proposal.

Summary

The applicant has conducted pre-application discussions with Natural England who have confirmed that the site is suitable to provide an extension to the existing Chobham SANG.

Prior to submitting the planning application, a pre-application approach and discussion has been had with the Council. This confirmed that the change of use for the provision of a SANG extension to Chobham Water Meadows was acceptable to them in principle but indicated they would wish to see it in their ownership.

Whilst the applicant would wish to retain the site, they acknowledge the Council's position and expect this issue to be worked out during the determination period and encapsulated with the accompanying s106 Legal Agreement.

The proposed route for the footpath extension is submitted as a suggestion with the exact details to be left to planning condition, to enable the final details to be worked out later given the potential for the Council to take over the site. It is expected that the management and maintenance of the site would become part of the overall management of the adjoining Council owned Chobham Meadow SANG, irrespective of who owns it. This again to be secured via planning condition or s106.

Notwithstanding the above the application is accompanied by sufficient technical information including topographic survey, ecological reports and an arboricultural assessment to provide certainty that a route can be provided on the site and inform its subsequent fixing via planning condition.

We consider that the extension to the existing Chobham Meadow SANG is an acceptable proposal which will benefit the Borough through the provision of c1ha of additional open space. This will help offsite additional development in the area with the minimum of disturbance and can be brought forward quickly and within the current five year plan period.

I look forward to hearing from you once the application has been validated, but if I can be of assistance in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



David Butcher
Associate Director
Tetra Tech Limited.