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Our ref: 306929



Aylesbury Vale District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear David Broadley,

Planning Consultation: Ickford Neighbourhood Plan

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 21st January 2020.

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.

Natural England is a statutory consultee in neighbourhood planning and must be consulted on draft neighbourhood development plans by the Parish/Town Councils or Neighbourhood Forums where our interests would be affected by the proposals made.

In our review of the Ickford Neighbourhood Plan we would like to thank the parish council for taking many of our previous comments on board.

We have one point surrounding the Natural England Bernwood Forest focus area, which you have included mention of within 6.19. I have re-included our specific advice r.e. this ancient hunting forest below. We would advise mention of the key objectives of the area, namely creating good habitat for bats, managing hedgerows for butterflies, creating/restoring lowland meadows and linking of areas of ancient woodland.

Bernwood Focus Area

Your parish is within the Bernwood Focus Area. Bernwood covers the relics of the ancient royal hunting forest in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, in an approximate triangle between Oxford, Buckingham and Aylesbury encompassing the river Ray and the Thame. The area supports the best population in the country of black and brown hairstreak butterflies which lay their eggs on the thick blackthorn hedgerows weaving between the ancient woodlands and species-rich lowland meadows. The area provides habitat for a number of wading birds and bat species including the rare Bechstein's bat. The area still supports a few isolated pairs of breeding turtle doves which need scruffy arable margins close to large thick hedges in order to survive.

Creating good habitat for bats

A network of woodland, hedges and clean water sources will benefit not only bats but other fauna and flora. For information on how to create ponds for bats, Freshwater Habitats Trust produced an information package alongside Bat Conservation Trust which can be found [here](#). You may want to look

at how to incorporate good habitat for bats into gardens as part of you parish's green infrastructure [here](#). Ponds also create sources of fresh water in your community, providing habitat for two thirds of freshwater species and outdoor spaces for the community to visit. More information can be found [here](#).

Managing hedgerows for butterflies

The Bernwood area has a large network of blackthorn hedges, these need to be maintained by cutting every three years rather than annually so that hairstreak butterflies can successfully lay their eggs. You may want to consider creating new species-rich hedgerows and there is the chance to use ancient practises such as hedge laying. More information on management can be found [here](#).

Where possible, existing hedgerows and mature trees should be retained and additional ones planted as part of the landscaping scheme. These opportunities should always offer optimal wildlife benefits, by planting mixed native hedges, with a dominant component of blackthorn to benefit a variety of common species as well as the hairstreaks. Planting of trees in and around residential developments is important not just within the allocated open green areas/parks.

Creating or restoring lowland meadows

Lowland meadow is a declining habitat but is still littered across this part of the UK. Priorities should be to expand the area of lowland meadows by restoring semi-improved grasslands and re-creating lowland meadows on improved grassland and arable land. Where possible, action should be targeted at expanding and linking existing sites. Magnificent Meadows have very useful information [here](#). Consider how to join up habitats to improve connectivity on a landscape-scale for example BBOWT Living Landscape of the [Upper Ray](#).

Ancient woodland

Ancient woodland and veteran trees are an irreplaceable habitat which has heritage and cultural value and provides ecosystem services, such as shade, reduction of flood risk, carbon capture, improved air quality and purification of water. It is preferable to link up fragmented areas by connecting up woodland which would be divided by development with green bridges or tunnels, buffering it by leaving an appropriate zone of semi natural habitat between the development and the woodland, providing wildlife corridors and balancing new developments and residential areas with green infrastructure, allowing space for trees. The Woodland Trust have further information which can be found [here](#) and funding streams on how to enhance existing ancient woodland and expand woodland can be found below.

Beyond biodiversity

Creating and enhancing some of these habitats will not only ensure better biodiversity and habitat for rare butterflies, bats, great crested newts but, if located in the right places, it can also help to provide more clean water in the catchment, increase climate change resilience¹, help with floodwater management and improve air quality. Providing accessible natural areas can also help to improve both the mental and physical health² of the people in your parish.

Do you have any environmental projects in mind for your parish? Below are some funds you may be interested in to help enhance you community:

HS2 woodland fund

This enables woodland land owners to restore PAWS (Plantation on Ancient Woodland) or extend existing ancient woodland in a 25 mile radius of the HS2 line. Information on how to apply can be found [here](#).

HS2 Community and Environment Fund

This fund is designed for communities along the HS2 route that are demonstrably disrupted by the construction of Phase One from London to Birmingham. Information on how to apply can be found [here](#).

Yours sincerely,

Eleanor Sweet-Escott
Lead Adviser – Sustainable Development
Thames Solent Team