

19/503912

Representation

Councillor Harwood has raised the following (summarised) points. The officer's response is provided in bold below each point:

1. Consider that too many non-native hedges and trees some of which are invasive and will harm ancient woodland are proposed, and comments on some of the specific trees proposed.

It is agreed that there are too many non-native hedges that could also have negative implications for the ancient woodland. Therefore an amended condition is proposed as set out below, and the applicant is agreeable to such changes.

2. Question whether solar photovoltaics can be provided for all affordable housing.

Solar PV is not a policy requirement under the Local Plan, however, the applicant is agreeable to providing solar panels on the affordable housing apartment blocks. Therefore an additional condition is proposed to secure this as set out below.

3. Refers to gas central heating being proposed and whether an electric central heating scheme should be negotiated bearing in mind gas heating may soon be outlawed.

The method of central heating within houses is a Building Regulations matter and not a planning consideration, and there is no requirement within the Local Plan for any measures relating to this.

4. Questions why slow worms are to be translocated to Staplehurst and not kept on site.

Low numbers of reptiles were recorded during a survey of the site in 2014 and an updated survey in 2019 revealed no reptiles were recorded. Following this survey, reptile mitigation was implemented which involved a destructive search of the site (except the areas around the badger sett in the central open space). No reptiles were captured during the destructive search. So essentially there were no reptiles on the areas proposed for development in 2019.

KCC Ecology advise that retaining small numbers of reptiles within a site which would be the case here (should any be found prior to development), may mean the population is not viable. They recommend that if any were present within the area surrounding the badger sett they should be translocated to an offsite receptor site to ensure that the population can survive. This is considered appropriate as set out in the main report.

However, should Committee consider that any reptiles found within the central space should be retained then delegated powers would be sought to require an alternative reptile mitigation scheme to retain them on site with suitable habitat provided, which would be most suitable within the ancient woodland buffer along the west boundary of the site.

5. Question whether a permanently wet feature could be provided.

The applicant is currently investigating whether a permanent pond can be provided and an update will be provided at the Committee meeting.

6. Question whether spaces under fences / hedgehog highways or wildlife friendly highway drainage gullies are proposed.

As outlined at paragraph 7.51, hedgehog corridors are proposed and secured under condition 9. Wildlife friendly drainage gullies can be added to this condition.

7. Question why the ancient woodland buffer is crossed by two paths and how it would be protected.

As outlined at paragraph 7.13, there is a pedestrian/cycle link in the northwest corner which falls within the 15m ancient woodland buffer. This is proposed here because the approved pedestrian/cycle link on the housing scheme to the north will meet the site here. It is considered that a path must be provided to ensure connectivity between the housing developments.

The path further south does fall within the ancient woodland buffer and this will be moved further south so it is outside the buffer. This will be secured via a condition requiring an amended plan as set out below.

The ancient woodland buffer would be fenced off with post and rail fencing to prevent public access.

Amended Conditions

6. Notwithstanding the soft landscaping details submitted and prior to any development taking place above slab level, an amended landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The amended scheme shall provide predominantly native species planting, and remove any non-native invasive species. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of landscape, visual impact and amenity of the area and to ensure a satisfactory appearance to the development.

9. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the mitigation strategies for reptiles, bats, breeding birds, badgers, and the ancient woodland, and the ecological enhancements, as outlined in the Ecological Design Strategy dated November 2019 and Corylus Ecology letter dated 7th January 2020 and include the use of wildlife friendly gullies on all roads.

Reason: In the interest of biodiversity management and enhancement.

Additional Conditions

No development above slab level shall take place until details of photovoltaic panels for the affordable housing apartments blocks have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and thereafter retained.

Reason: To ensure the renewable measured proposals are provided.

Notwithstanding the plans submitted and prior to the commencement of development, amended plans shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority showing a path link to the west which is located outside the ancient woodland buffer. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interest of connectivity and good design.

Recommendation

Approve as per the conditions in the Committee report subject to the amended and additional conditions set out above.