

Date: 27 November 2019  
Our ref: 298500  
Your ref: 19NP0099



Mr. Jay. Smith  
Northumberland National Park Authority  
Eastburn  
South Park  
Hexham  
Northumberland

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

## BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mr. Jay. Smith

**Planning consultation: Installation of mesh track (1000m x 2m)**  
**Location: Langleford, Wooler, Northumberland, NE71 6RG**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 18 October 2019 which was received by Natural England on the same date

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

#### FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED TO DETERMINE IMPACTS ON DESIGNATED SITES

As submitted, the application could have potential significant effects on the Cheviot Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Natural England requires further information in order to determine the significance of these impacts and the scope for mitigation.

The following information is required:

- *Habitat survey*
- *Assessment of direct and indirect impacts on bird assemblage*
- *Any identified mitigation that may be required as a result of the impact assessment*
- *Monitoring proposals*
- *Clarification and revision of mesh specification and aspects of the associated working methodology.*

Without this information, Natural England may need to object to the proposal.

Please re-consult Natural England once this information has been obtained.

Natural England's further advice on designated sites/landscapes and advice on other issues is set out below.

## Additional Information required

- A **habitat survey** to classify, map and quantify the notified SSSI habitats to be impacted by the installation of the mesh tracks and the associated activities (e.g. use of a Haglund vehicle to transport materials). The habitat survey should also include peat depth measurements to verify the surface vegetation types mapped.
- An assessment of any direct and indirect **impacts** of the proposals on the notified SSSI habitats present and SSSI bird assemblage.
- Proposals to avoid or **mitigate** any potential impacts identified.
- Proposals for a **'rest period'** (i.e. non-usage of the mesh tracks after installation for a specified period of time) to allow the vegetation to recover and grow into the mesh.
- Proposals to **monitor** the effects of the proposed mesh tracks over a specified timescale and the incorporation of remedial measures (e.g. removal, relocation or re-profiling of some or all of the mesh) to deal with any adverse effects that may be raised as a result of such monitoring.
- **Clarification and revision of the specification for the mesh tracks and aspects of the associated working methodology (including but not restricted to the items listed below).**
  - An **alternative and appropriate mesh specification** is required. The proposals submitted are for 4mm thick turf reinforcement mesh designed to protect reseeded grass on firm ground from pedestrian impacts in urban amenity situations. However, the two mesh tracks proposed along the lines of butts appear to be on uneven wet blanket bog in an upland situation and will be required to support quad bikes and argocats. This grass turf mesh will simply sink or break, or both, if traversed by such vehicles. The submitted documentation has justified the use of mesh by illustrating a well vegetated section of trial plastic mesh at Comb Fell (to the south east of Langleeford) which was installed in partnership with the Northumberland National Park Authority in 2013 in accordance with a Natural England consent. This example is actually a 14.5mm thick moorland mesh (**see attached Comb Fell documentation**) specifically designed for use by lighter moorland vehicles and which is more likely to withstand sinking and breakage in such boggy terrain and associated damage to underlying habitats. The applicant should therefore re-submit the current proposals with the appropriate mesh specification.
  - Details of the route and frequency of passes by use **Haglund** vehicle to transport the materials, should also be provided to demonstrate how potential impacts on sensitive habitats such as blanket bog are being avoided or minimised.
  - Details of any **'micro-reprofiling'** of sections of rutted peat (in combination with the proposed strimming of vegetation) that may be required to enable the laying of the mesh.
  - Details of a **specified time period** for the works to avoid \ reduce disturbance to ground nesting birds (rather than generic statement that works will commence in summer 2020).

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.

### Other advice

In addition, Natural England would advise on the following issues.

### Protected Landscapes

The proposed development is for a site within or close to a nationally designated landscape namely Northumberland National Park. Natural England advises that the planning authority uses national and local policies, together with local landscape expertise and information to determine the

proposal. The policy and statutory framework to guide your decision and the role of local advice are explained below.

Your decision should be guided by paragraph 172 of the National Planning Policy Framework which gives the highest status of protection for the 'landscape and scenic beauty' of AONBs and National Parks. For major development proposals paragraph 172 sets out criteria to determine whether the development should exceptionally be permitted within the designated landscape.

Alongside national policy you should also apply landscape policies set out in your development plan, or appropriate saved policies.

The landscape advisor/planner for the National Park will be best placed to provide you with detailed advice about this development proposal. Their knowledge of the site and its wider landscape setting, together with the aims and objectives of the park's management plan, will be a valuable contribution to the planning decision. Where available, a local Landscape Character Assessment can also be a helpful guide to the landscape's sensitivity to this type of development and its capacity to accommodate the proposed development.

The statutory purposes of the National Park are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the park; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park by the public. You should assess the application carefully as to whether the proposed development would have a significant impact on or harm those statutory purposes. Relevant to this is the duty on public bodies to 'have regard' for those statutory purposes in carrying out their functions (section 11 A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended)). The Planning Practice Guidance confirms that this duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

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

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on [REDACTED]

Should the applicant wish to discuss the further information required and scope for mitigation with Natural England, we would be happy to provide advice through our [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Miller  
Lead Sustainable Development Advisor

## Annex A – Additional advice

Natural England offers the following additional advice:

### Landscape

Paragraph 170a of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through the planning system. This application may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes, including any local landscape designations. You may want to consider whether any local landscape features or characteristics (such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls) could be incorporated into the development in order to respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness, in line with any local landscape character assessments.

Where the impacts of development are likely to be significant, a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment should be provided with the proposal to inform decision making. We refer you to the [Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment](#) for further guidance.

### Protected Species

Natural England has produced [standing advice](#)<sup>1</sup> to help planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. We advise you to refer to this advice. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on protected species where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

### Local sites and priority habitats and species

You should consider the impacts of the proposed development on any local wildlife or geodiversity sites, in line with paragraph 170a and 174a of the NPPF and any relevant development plan policy. There may also be opportunities to enhance local sites and improve their connectivity. Natural England does not hold locally specific information on local sites and recommends further information is obtained from appropriate bodies such as the local records centre, wildlife trust, geoconservation groups or recording societies.

Priority habitats and Species are of particular importance for nature conservation and included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Most priority habitats will be mapped either as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, on the Magic website or as Local Wildlife Sites. List of priority habitats and species can be found [here](#)<sup>2</sup>. Natural England does not routinely hold species data, such data should be collected when impacts on priority habitats or species are considered likely. Consideration should also be given to the potential environmental value of brownfield sites, often found in urban areas and former industrial land, further information including links to the open mosaic habitats inventory can be found [here](#).

### Access and Recreation

Natural England encourages any proposal to incorporate measures to help improve people's access to the natural environment. Measures such as reinstating existing footpaths together with the creation of new footpaths and bridleways should be considered. Links to other green networks and, where appropriate, urban fringe areas should also be explored to help promote the creation of wider green infrastructure. Relevant aspects of local authority green infrastructure strategies should be delivered where appropriate.

### Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access and National Trails

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF highlights the important of public rights of way and access. Development should consider potential impacts on access land, common land, rights of way and coastal access routes in the vicinity of the development. Consideration should also be given to the potential impacts on the any nearby National Trails. The National Trails website [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk) provides information including contact details for the National Trail Officer. Appropriate mitigation measures should be incorporated for any adverse impacts.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

<sup>2</sup><http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140711133551/http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/biodiversity/protectandmanage/habsandspeciesimportance.aspx>

**Biodiversity duty**

Your authority has a [duty](#) to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of your decision making. Conserving biodiversity can also include restoration or enhancement to a population or habitat. Further information is available [here](#).