

Date: 20 January 2023
Our ref: 417561
Your ref: 22/P/R3EIA



BY EMAIL ONLY:

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

T 0300 060 3900

Dear Madam

Planning consultation: 22/P/1768/R3EIA – Amended: 3.3km single carriageway road from A371 Summer Lane to A368 Towerhead Road with Environmental Statement for Banwell Bypass
Location: Land to North and East of Banwell including Mitigation Highway land in Sandford, Windscombe and Churchill

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 20 December 2022 which was received by Natural England on the same date. We refer also to the email from Simon Dorken dated 21 December 2022 containing the Position Statement and links to:

Bat Survey Report – Autumn 2022 (covering Crossing Point surveys undertaken in 2022);
Badger – Situation report – November 2022

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

NO OBJECTION - SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATE MITIGATION BEING SECURED

We consider that without appropriate mitigation the application would:

- have an adverse effect on the integrity of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>.

We welcome the positive response made by the team following our site visit on 21 October 2022 and our meeting on 28 November 2022.

We welcome, in particular, the addition of 7.7 hectares of land (to be managed specifically for bat mitigation) to the Scheme Red Line Boundary by an addition to the Compulsory Purchase Order.

In response to the re-consultation, we have some additional comments and these are set out below.

Bat Survey Report- Autumn 2022 – We note that surveys undertaken through the Autumn period

have detected low numbers of Horseshoe bats across the scheme but especially to the west side of the scheme. We reiterate our view that we do not consider the survey times (90 mins) to be long enough and in addition to this, several surveys (20% of those planned) were either missed entirely or cut short due to either weather or livestock. This is a concern given that these surveys “will form part of early baseline data for future monitoring of the Scheme as it develops through the construction and operational phases.” We note that, in response to our previous comments, surveys in 2023 will be undertaken in every month from April – October. We welcome the fact that the survey length will be extended to 120 mins and that static detectors will be deployed to record Horseshoe bat activity after midnight, especially in the Knightcott area where streetlights are switched off at midnight.

HEP and BNG Mitigation Technical Note – We welcome the fact that, excluding the 20m buffer either side of the carriageway, enough mitigation land is being provided to ensure no net loss for Horseshoe bats. We query the sentence, “all habitat outside of the habitat buffer is suitable for Horseshoe Bats... however it has been *excluded* from the HEP calculation...” as this may be a typo.

Conservation Grazing Review of Feasibility – whilst we welcome this document, we do not consider that it amounts to a review of feasibility or that it demonstrates that grazing on mitigation land adjacent to the Scheme is deliverable. We welcome the reference to precise holding sizes along the Scheme length and the information on other local landscape grazing projects which have been successful (North Devon) but our view is that further work is needed, eg investigating whether there local graziers who are willing and who have the right stock, developing a workable management plan and investing in the necessary infrastructure. We are concerned that some of the holdings identified are very small (eg Holdings 7, 9 and 10 are either 0.1 or 0.2ha only) so it has not been demonstrated that these could be grazed without seeing the detailed management plan.

Environmental Masterplans Sheets 1 -6 (Revision P06 and P08 for sheet 5) - We welcome the changes to these plans and note that they now include additional bat hopover points in line with our recommendation.

Environmental Statement Update Report – we welcome the commitment in this document to early planting along the Scheme where possible and also to retaining wide grassy buffers in areas for site compounds and gapping up hedges in these fields to maintain habitat connectivity for Horseshoe bats during construction.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on 07867 900 281.

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

Yours faithfully

Alison Howell
Lead Advisor, Sustainable Development
Wessex Area Team