

From: Earley, Amelia <Amelia.Earley@naturalengland.org.uk>
Sent: 11 August 2022 17:12
To: Charmian Eyre-Walker
Subject: P22/01300/O - NE Comments [EXTERNAL]

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Dear Charmian,

Thank you for consulting Natural England on the above proposal. Natural England's advice on designated sites is set out below.

Lower Woods SSSI & Bishop's Hill Wood SSSI

Lower Woods is an exceptionally important site in ecological terms. The SSSI is the most extensive ancient woodland in Avon and comprises a mosaic of different habitat types which give rise to an extraordinarily rich and diverse ecological community. This includes 12 species of bats recorded on the site notably a Bechstein's maternity roost and a likely Barbastelle maternity roost. Bishops Hill Wood SSSI is designated for species-rich, ancient broadleaved woodland together with associated and steeply sloping, neutral-grassland habitats on damp and heavy soils.

Natural England has concerns regarding the potential for this proposal to result in an increase in recreational pressure at Lower Woods SSSI and Bishop's Hill Wood SSSI. This application would result in an increase in housing in close proximity to the SSSIs, both of which appear to be within walking distance of the site.

We have previously raised concerns regarding recreational pressure at Lower Woods SSSI in our response to the South Gloucestershire GI strategy, and the potential for settlement growth in close proximity to Lower Woods SSSI and Bishop's Hill Wood SSSI to result in an adverse effect on the reasons for designation for these sites in our response to the South Gloucestershire New Local Plan Phase 2 consultation.

The Lower Woods SSSI management plan adopted in 2016 noted that increased visitor numbers were already having impacts on the site through paths becoming wider and muddier and the near total loss of trackside vegetation in some places. In addition to this, problems associated with more frequent use of the site by dog walkers such as defecation and disturbance are also noted. Natural England understand that recreational pressure at Lower Woods SSSI has increased during Covid. It is our understanding through conversations with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust that increased visitor numbers are putting an increasing financial pressure on site management.

We recommend that the LPA consult Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, as the managers of the site they will be well placed to advise on the existing pressure at Lower Woods SSSI.

Kind regards,
Amelia

Amelia Earley (she/her)

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