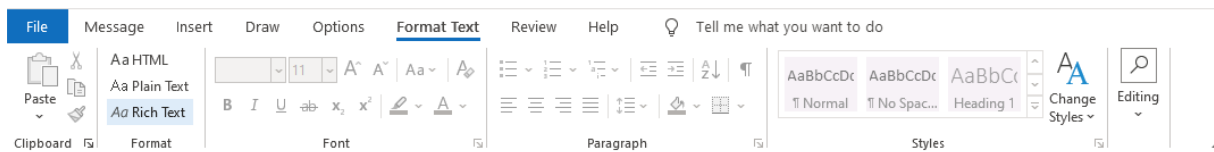


Appendix A.14: Natural England's pre-application advice on Nitrogen Deposition Compensation proposals at Blue Bell Hill and Burham (dated 31 May 2022)



Lower Thames Crossing - Blue Bell Hill compensatory habitat design principles - Natural England comments

Hanna, Sean
To Sam Ireland; Cryer, Russell
Cc McKernan, Patrick; Katie Miller

Tue 31/05/2022 15:27

Dear Sam

Thank you for sharing the draft ecological and landscape principles for the NDep compensation land at Blue Bell Hill following our meeting on the 16 May. We welcome the design principles and are broadly supportive of them. I have provided some comments below (in blue text) which I hope are helpful and we look forward to continuing working with you and partners as the detailed design evolves over the coming months.

Draft AONB Landscape principles (Blue Bell Hill)

Current overarching principle

- Landscape integration –to reflect the surrounding landscape character

Proposed principles

- Habitat creation shall be designed to conserve and enhance the existing landscape character of the Kent Downs AONB
- Habitat creation shall reflect the historic landscape characteristics of the Blue Bell Hill site where appropriate *It would also appear appropriate for this principle to ensure that the design is sympathetic to the landscape it sits within in terms of the shape, soft edges, transition from grassland through scrub to woodland and reflecting the historical field patterns/boundaries, for example. This should help integrate the habitat into the AONB and provide a natural, rather than planted, feel.*
- Opportunities shall be taken in the design of habitats to screen existing visual detractors, for example, overhead power lines and telecommunications masts, in particular those from public rights of way within the site and surrounding landscape
- The design of habitats shall aim to maintain any key views and vistas from the Blue Bell Hill site identified through site appraisal
- New habitats and subsequent management adjacent to public rights of way, including North Downs Way, shall be designed for variety of user interest and to incorporate glimpsed views and vistas

Draft Ecology Principles

Management Requirements

- a) Provide permanent wildlife-rich habitat
 - I. Primarily woodland at a landscape scale
 - II. Providing other habitats in recognition of habitats significantly affected by the LTC project operational Ndep effects
 - III. Providing 'ideal' mosaics of habitats / features in preference to simple 'mirroring' of affected habitats *It would be helpful for the term 'ideal habitats' to be defined/clarified*
 - IV. Integrating objectives with local nature conservation strategies *It may be appropriate to include the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy in here too*
- b) Assess current condition of sites to identify valuable features to retain and build on as well as remedial actions such as nutrient removal and invasive species management
- c) Achieve habitat creation through natural regeneration wherever appropriate *As we have discussed previously, natural regeneration is the preferred approach from a biodiversity perspective as it will help provide a more robust habitat with species appropriate to the location and can help with wider environmental benefits such as carbon storage. As such, it may be appropriate to strengthen this principle by saying something along the lines of 'Preferentially achieving habitat creation through natural regeneration wherever possible'.*
- d) Integrate biodiversity objectives with other objectives wherever feasible and not undermining the biodiversity objectives
 - I. Existing interests such as AONB / Landscape, Conservation areas, Heritage assets *As part of the discussions on the detailed design, it would be sensible for the design to reflect the AONB Management Plan requirements where the habitat creation can help contribute to them.*
 - II. Potential additional benefits such as community benefits e.g. enhanced access
 - III. Visitor/ public information/ education boards and signage in relation to biodiversity and the benefits of natural regeneration *Given the habitat creation will take place within the Kent Downs AONB, it would appear appropriate for the interpretation and signage to recognise the landscape as well as biodiversity benefits that the habitat is contributing to*
 - IV. Avoid significant effects on other receptors
 - V. Ensure security and avoidance of unwanted activities

Further detailed management requirements will be provided during the detailed design phase of the Project.

–oLEMPAdvisory Group *The creation of the Advisory Group is welcomed and we will be pleased to provide further advice as part of the Advisory Group as the design evolves over the coming months*

Kind regards
Sean

Sean Hanna
Senior Adviser
Natural England Sussex and Kent Team, 9th Floor, International House, Dover Place, Kent TN23 1HU

Direct dial [REDACTED] Email [REDACTED]

Please note: I work compressed hours and do not generally work on a Friday.