

- a) **DOV/23/01095 – Erection of a 120-bed hotel (C1) building with associated spa facilities, gym, restaurant/bar, access, landscaping and parking - Betteshanger Country Park, Sandwich Road, Sholden**

Reasons for referral to Planning Committee – public interest and number of objections

- b) **Summary of Recommendation**

That planning permission be granted subject to conditions and completion of a s.106 agreement to secure planning obligations.

- c) **Planning Policy and Guidance**

Development Plan

The statutory development plan comprises:

- Core Strategy (2010) (“**the Core Strategy**”)
- Land Allocations Local Plan (2015)
- Saved Polices of the Local Plan (2002)

Relevant polices of the Core Strategy include:

- CP1: Settlement Hierarchy
- CP2: Provision for Jobs and Homes
- CP5: Sustainable Construction Standards
- CP6: Infrastructure
- CP7: Green Infrastructure Network
- DM1: Settlement Boundaries
- DM11: Location of Development and Managing Travel Demand
- DM12: Road Hierarchy and Development
- DM13: Parking Provision
- DM15: Protection of the Countryside
- DM16: Landscape Character
- DM25: Open Space

Relevant saved polices of the include:

- CO8: Development Affecting Hedgerows
- ER6: Light Pollution

As is the case with the development plan, where existing policies were adopted prior to the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) (“**the Framework**”), the weight to be given to them depends on their degree of consistency with the policies of the Framework (paragraph 225).

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)

The Framework sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It is therefore a material consideration, to which significant weight should be attached in determining the application. Of particular

relevance to the determination of this application is paragraph 8, which is the general overarching sustainable development element of the Framework. This states:

“Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

- ***an economic objective*** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure
- ***a social objective*** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and
- ***an environmental objective*** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy”.

Relevant chapters of the Framework include:

2. Achieving sustainable development
4. Decision making
6. Building a strong competitive economy
8. Promoting healthy and safe communities
9. Promoting sustainable transport
12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places
14. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Also of particular importance are the following paragraphs:

Paragraph 88: *“Planning policies and decision should enable:*

- a) *the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural area, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) *the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.”*

Paragraph 186 a): When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles: *“if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less*

harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;”

Other relevant paragraphs include paragraphs 7-11 (relating to the achievement of sustainable development); paragraphs 85-89 (relating to building a strong, competitive economy); paragraph 91 (relating to sequential tests for town centre uses); paragraphs 102-103 (relating to open space); paragraphs 114-117 (relating to highway matters); and paragraph 165-171 (relating to flooding and the sequential and exceptions tests).

Sections of the Framework are referred to, as relevant, in the assessment section of this report below.

Planning Practice Guidance

The Planning Practice Guidance (“**the PPG**”) is a live document containing more detailed advice on how policies in the Framework should be interpreted and applied. It was first published in 2014 and is subject to frequent updates and revision.

Of particular relevance to the determination of this application are the following sections:

What weight can be given to a material consideration?

The law makes a clear distinction between the question of whether something is a material consideration and the weight which it is to be given. Whether a particular consideration is material will depend on the circumstances of the case and is ultimately a decision for the courts. Provided regard is had to all material considerations, it is for the decision maker to decide what weight is to be given to the material considerations in each case, and (subject to the test of reasonableness) the courts will not get involved in the question of weight.¹

Is there a statutory basis for seeking to conserve and enhance biodiversity?

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all public authorities in England and Wales to have regard, in the exercise of their functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making throughout the public sector, which should be seeking to make a significant contribution to the achievement of the commitments made by government in its 25 Year Environment Plan.²

Draft Dover District Local Plan

The draft Dover District Local Plan (Regulation 19 submission – October 2022) (“**the draft Local Plan**”) sets out planning policies and proposals for new development in the district over the period from 2020 to 2040 and when adopted will replace the existing development plan. The draft Local Plan has been subject to Regulation 19 consultation and was submitted in March 2023 for examination. Hearing sessions took place during November and December 2023.

The draft Local Plan is a material planning consideration in the determination of this planning application. The weight to be afforded to its policies depends (in accordance with paragraph 48 of the Framework) on the stage of preparation of the emerging plan,

¹ Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 21b-009-20140306

² Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 8-009-20190721

the extent to which there are unresolved objections to the relevant policies, and the consistency of relevant policies with the Framework.

Relevant policies of the draft Local Plan include:

- SP1: Planning for Climate Change
- SP2: Planning for Healthy and Inclusive Communities
- SP6: Economic Growth
- SP11: Infrastructure and Developer Contributions
- SP13: Protecting Designated Environmental Sites
- SP14: Enhancing Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
- CC1: Reducing Carbon Emissions
- CC2: Sustainable Design and Construction
- CC4: Water Efficiency
- CC5: Flood Risk
- CC6: Surface Water Management
- CC8: Tree Planting and Protection
- PM1: Achieving High Quality Design, Place Making & Design Codes
- PM5: Protection of Open Space, Sports Facilities and Local Green Space
- E4: Tourist Accommodation and Attractions
- R2: Sequential Test and Impact Assessment
- TI1: Sustainable Transport and Travel
- TI2: Transport Statements, Assessments and Travel Plans
- TI3: Parking Provision on New Development
- NE1: Biodiversity Net Gain
- NE2: Landscape Character and the Kent Downs AONB
- NE3: Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay SPA Mitigation and Monitoring Strategy
- NE4: Air Quality
- NE5: Water Supply and Quality

Legislation

- The combined effect of section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) is that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- Regulation 122 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) applies in the event that planning permission is granted and requires that a planning obligation (under s.106 of Town and Country Planning Act 1990) may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission for the development if the obligation is (a) necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; (b) directly related to the development; and (c) fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.
- Under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended), the Council as a public authority has a duty to further the general biodiversity objective, which is the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through the exercise of functions.

d) Relevant Planning History

Betteshanger Colliery and Tip Site

02/00905 Erection of Class B1, B2 and B8 business, industrial and warehousing units, creation of community park and country park, erection of visitor centre, construction of recreational cycling facilities and sculpture park and construction of water treatment facilities, access roundabout, roads and car parking facilities. Permission granted 17/08/04.

Betteshanger Country Park

06/00131 Erection of visitor centre for temporary period. Permission granted 12/05/06.

09/01165 Construction of two play areas. Permission granted 05/05/10.

14/00262 Erection of a single storey building for use as a visitor centre, re-siting and upgrade of children's play space, erection of a 'camera obscura' structure, ground works and alterations to internal access road and parking (existing visitor centre to be removed). Permission granted 26/09/14.

22/01152 Erection of a 120 bed hotel (C1) building with associated spa facilities, gym, restaurant/bar, access, landscaping and parking. Considered by Planning Committee on 13/07/23: resolved to refuse application on the following two grounds:

1. *Betteshanger Country Park is an area of open space that provides great value and amenity, reflected in it being designated an Asset of Community Value as furthering the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. The proposed hotel development would result in the loss of part of the designated open space and an incompatible change in the character and appearance of the Country Park due to its scale, intensity of use, level of activity and visitor numbers, and restrictive management measures. These impacts would harm the amenity and wellbeing enjoyed by users of the Country Park and would be contrary to Policies CP7, DM15 and DM16 of the Dover District Core Strategy (2010); Policies SP2, SP14, E4, PM5, PM6 and NE2 of the Dover District Local Plan (submission draft October 2022); and chapters 8, 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*

2. *The proposed hotel development would result in a significant disturbance and increase in visitor numbers to Betteshanger Country Park that would impact upon habitat that supports a population of turtle doves and habitat relied upon to facilitate an expansion and the long-term future of that population, as mitigation of development being delivered under planning permission reference DOV/20/00419. The measures proposed in connection with the hotel development are not considered adequate, with significant uncertainties to ensure there would not be significant harm to that turtle dove population and objectives of mitigation relied upon by planning permission reference DOV/20/00419. As such, development would be contrary to Policies SP13, SP14 and E4 of the Dover District Local Plan (submission draft October 2022) and chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*

Application withdrawn.

22/01158 Erection of a surfing lagoon and pools, hub building (to include café/restaurant/bar lounge, shop, hiring and changing facilities and multi-use space), 15 overnight holiday pods, learning hive, yoga studio, fitness / health and wellbeing facilities, bike / pumptrack and associated roads, paths, car and cycle parking, together with landscaping and necessary access works and associated site infrastructure. Pending consideration – application also on this agenda.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening for development of a 120 bed hotel building with associated spa facilities, gym, restaurant / bar, access, landscaping and parking. Screening opinion issued 03/07/23 that development is not EIA development.

Former Colliery Pithead (located to the west of the application site)

20/00419 Outline application with all matters reserved for up to 210 dwellings including up to 12 self-build plots, together with up to 2,500 sqm of office (Class B1 use) floorspace and up to 150 sqm of retail (Class E) floorspace. Planning permission granted 27/07/21, not implemented.

22/01364 Replacement of existing road. Planning permission granted 19/12/22.

22/01379 Reserved matters application for the details landscaping, layout, scale and appearance for the residential phase of approved outline permission 20/00419. Approved 27/04/23.

e) **Consultee and Third-Party Representations**

Consultee Responses

Sholden Parish Council

Objects to this second, minimally varied, application previously refused as 22/01152. The application breaches Core Strategy (2010) policies, policies in the Dover District draft Local Plan and numerous paragraphs of the NPPF (September 2023).

This proposal is nothing more than a business bailout for the failing business of Betteshanger Country Park. Nowhere in planning law, planning statutes, Planning Policy Guidance and the NPPF is there provision for such proposals. The NPPF sets out in paragraph eight the key elements of sustainable development.

Economic - planning applications must achieve sustainable development by helping to build strong, responsive and competitive economies (including on the right land)

- The applicant has stated that they cannot profitably own and manage a country park. The applicant is a builder and developer. It therefore follows (and as proven by the financially failing Betteshanger Country Park) that the applicant has no proven track record in managing and running a successful hotel business which in turn will benefit the local economy.
- Whilst the applicant has submitted costs and visitor numbers, the £30m proposed investment seems to have been plucked from the air and visitor numbers are speculation.
- The Economic Benefits Statement has been written (a) without a detailed economic viability study – it contains far reaching strategic aims not supported

by peer reviews and (b) has probably been written for the benefit of this application and not as an independent piece of research.

- The applicant indicated, via its management of Herne Bay Sports Club, that it could successfully manage an hotel. The applicant has placed this significant community asset into the hands of a charitable trust, and it is run by the four local amateur sports clubs. Not by the applicant. Herne Bay Sports Club bears no relation to a 120-bed hotel.
- The applicant's Planning Statement refers to closing Betteshanger Country Park should planning permission for this proposed hotel be refused. That is nothing short of planning blackmail? And has nothing to do with planning laws, guidance and the NPPF. It would not be legitimate for elected Councillors on the Planning Committee to give any planning weight whatsoever to the specific argument that the park might close if the hotel is not allowed.

Social Objective - planning applications must achieve a social objective – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities (including accessible services, open spaces that support communities' health, social and cultural well-being)

- Accept that this probably really refers to major housing developments and, with the exception of the removal of open spaces as envisaged in this proposal, building a 120-bed hotel for transitory holiday makers will not achieve, in any sense, the social objectives envisaged. It is clearly breached because already existing open space will be lost.

Environmental Objective - planning applications must contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural environment (including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy).

- The loss and damage to priority habitat, the loss and damage to rare and protected species, loss of public green space, increased water stress not to mention the detrimental impacts on air quality and more pollution from massively increased vehicular movements in and around the area have been stressed and highlighted by stakeholders.
- There are also literally hundreds of environmental objections from members of the public and individual environmental experts. The Parish Council fully supports these expert evidence-based environmental objections.
- The minimal changes submitted by the applicant do not mitigate the environmental damage that will be caused by this proposed development.
- The unresolved Section 106 Agreement and obligation on DDC to designate Betteshanger Country Park a Local Nature Reserve
- That Section 106 agreement expressly foresaw the creation of a Local Nature Reserve on the whole of the former spoil site and which is now the country park and on which this proposed hotel is to be built.
- The Parish Council now understands that the breach of this S.106 legally binding agreement has been investigated by DDC and DDC state that the concept of the Local Nature Reserve is "revocable".
- The Parish Council understands there is no legal or other basis for revoking the agreed Local Nature Reserve. Independent legal advice concerning should be sought.

The previous refusal

- The majority of members of the Planning Committee agreed and resolved that the previous application breached numerous policies and NPPF paragraphs.
- The previous application was withdrawn on 21 July before a formal decision notice could be issued. A fresh several hundred-page application was submitted on Friday 01 September: it somewhat lacks credibility that this new, minimally changed, application can have, in one month and validated in one day, resolved the 42 serious substantive issues referred to above.
- No pre-application advice sought by the applicant for this application.
- The applicant does not appear to have made any efforts to resolve the vast majority of the previous reasons for refusal and instead is relying on a theoretical economic bailout to get planning permission.

Conclusion

- The new hotel application is the same as the old one apart from covering a 14% smaller area and leaving some of the ponds where the water voles live.
- It is still an uneconomical, 120 bed hotel in the wrong place, damaging the environment to the extent that any positive economic impacts (if there are any at all) are far outweighed by the environmental damage caused should planning permission be granted.
- This proposal does not “will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area”, contrary to the NPPF. The application is a business bailout trying to save another business which is failing to make a profit. Without prejudice to that fundamental legal challenge, the application breaches numerous local policies and numerous paragraphs of the NPPF.

Matters of foul drainage and a suitable capacity capable waste water treatment plan must be addressed.

Deal Town Council

Deal Town Council's planning committee has resolved that Betteshanger Country Park should be declared a nature reserve.

Apart from the construction of the Mining Museum and related visitor facilities, Betteshanger Country Park has reverted to nature and is far from being the brownfield site it was in the immediate aftermath of the closure of the East Kent coal mines. The area now provides a haven for wildlife, some of which, like the turtle doves and orchids, are rare. It also provides a valued area of natural landscape which is important for the recreation and enjoyment of residents and visitors to Deal and the surrounding towns and villages.

The current proposals will seriously downgrade the Park's contribution to biodiversity and nature recovery. Those out-of-town proposals will also threaten the economic viability of Deal's town centre as visitors to the hotel and surf lagoon will be catered for on site. The employment opportunities provided on site will generally be unskilled, short-term and low-paid with the handful of permanent, better-paid posts being filled by specialists coming in from outside the area.

The proposals provide minimal benefits for Deal and adjacent communities but create massive disbenefits to those same communities and the natural world on which we all depend.

Dover District Council to use its powers to grant Betteshanger Country Park the protection it requires as a Local Nature Reserve.

Walmer Parish Council

Objects to this application on the grounds of traffic and biodiversity.

Upper Deal roundabout and the Mongeham Road junction with the A256 are over capacity and while the report state that the majority of traffic will be routed via the Eastry Bypass and past worth there will still be additional pressure put on the overcapacity A256 junctions which the Kent highway report refers to as dangerous.

Rejects the notion that you can move nature around to facilitate building. Lizard orchids and turtle dove population are among the rare species that need to be protected.

The site is presently going through the evaluation process for it to be classed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and therefore the needs of the wildlife that make this site a potential SSSI needs to be protected over development.

The site has been designated "Green Space". Removing green space would fail to meet this requirement.

The public has not been fully informed of numerous issues that may arise from construction.

Water vole habitat will be removed. The reed bed that the voles use is in the way so the Voles will be 'displaced. A study by Oxford University shows mitigation doesn't work, the Voles tend to stay put. In any case a large building with light and noise, built right up against their habitat is likely to result in the Voles abandoning the area altogether. Water Voles are an endangered species having disappeared from 90% of their previous habitats. They are fully protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The fiery clearwing moth is found on the hotel site. 23% of fiery clearwing moth eggs recorded at Betteshanger Country Park this year were found there. This species is endangered and fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Tree removal will happen if this proposal goes ahead. The line of mature conifers that you see on the left-hand side as you enter the park will be coming down along with all the scrub (young trees, brambles and wild plants) in that area. Birds, bees, butterflies, mammals, reptiles rely on this for food, for shelter for nesting. The area has the densest concentration of nesting birds in the whole park.

A badger sett on the hotel site will be shut off, with metal gates and netting so that the badgers can't get into their sett while the hotel is being built. Their habitat is going to be completely disrupted by development. Protected under the Badger Act.

The area is the most important for bats in the park. At least seven different species have been recorded here. They use the scrub and tree line for foraging and may roost nearby. How are they going to be affected by the light and noise from a big hotel? Bats are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The site is a receptor for reptiles under the original planning application when the Park was first set up. Reptiles were moved from the pit head area to the park where it was assumed they would be protected in the long term. Common Lizard, Grass snake, and Slowworm and Common Toad have been recorded on the site, but they are not considered to be an important feature. All Reptiles receive some protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Beavers use the ditches on the edge of the Hotel site and feed in the park. Being susceptible to light and noise how are they going to react to a hotel being built in their habitat? Beavers are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Turtle Doves have been recorded at 5 different locations on the edge of the park. A mitigation site, next to the hotel location, set up to maintain and increase the population, will fail. The proposed field that is offered as additional mitigation may not be suitable for another 20 years as a nesting site for this most threatened of birds.

Environment Agency

Based on the submitted information, considers that planning permission could be granted for the proposed development with conditions relating to finished floor levels of the hotel and sleeping accommodation (no lower than 4.80m AODN) and finished floor levels of the spa (no lower than 1.65m AODN).

The site lies within flood zone 1, 2 and 3, with the majority of the proposed development situated within flood zone 2. The site is partly affected by tidal inundation in the 1 in 200 year return period (with a climate change allowance). A detailed drawing of the outer face of the development relative to the flood extents has not been provided, however, it appears that although the extents do reach the site boundary, they will not affect the development itself. The finished floor levels are located significantly above the design flood level.

Natural England

In a response dated 20/09/23, Natural England originally reported it had no further comments, referring to its previous comments made regarding application 22/01152. These are:

- Since this application will result in a net increase in residential accommodation, impacts to the coastal Special Protection Area(s) and Ramsar Site(s) may result from increased recreational disturbance.
- Subject to an appropriate financial contribution being secured, Natural England is satisfied that the proposal will mitigate against the potential recreational impacts of the development on the designated site(s).
- Confirmed that lizard orchids relate only to the proposed wave pool scheme, application 22/01158.
- Information received indicates that fiery clearwing, protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended, is present on this site and Natural England would expect to see consideration of this to be included within any proposal.

In a response dated 01/11/23, Natural England expands its advice:

- Concerns centre around the uncertainties of using translocation techniques that do not have established research and methodologies associated with them. Relying on translocation techniques to maintain populations of species, when these techniques are not certain to work, produces an unacceptable level of risk in the current proposals.
- In order to grant a licence that would enable enactment of any planning permission, NE expects to see strong evidence that any proposals will ensure maintenance of the populations of the species in question.

- Additional techniques could result in maintaining populations – for example managing additional areas of habitat so that the species in question colonise and establish themselves, without translocation. It is possible that techniques such as this could provide evidence that the population was being maintained in a slightly shorter period than through translocation. NE is open to consider any research on translocation methodology that can provide evidence as to the potential success of these techniques - in this case licences may be considered for a small proportion of the population in order to build the evidence base to facilitate future decisions.

Response 06/02/2024

- NE is raising concerns because we do not want to be in a position where planning permission has been given for a project that we may not be able to issue a licence for
- NE need to be satisfied grant of a licence is not detrimental to the survival of any population of the species of animal of plant to which the licence relates.
- Currently translocation techniques do not have established research and methodologies to give us confidence they will work
- Understand the applicant intends to carry out research to develop and demonstrate the techniques can be successful at this site. It is not expected this could be achieved in a short time scale, typically takes 3-5 years for Lizard Orchids to mature.
- NE expects to see strong evidence to grant a licence
- NE are open to any research on translocation methodology that can provide evidence
- The suggested 7 year period, during which there is an opportunity for the applicant to demonstrate whether proposed translocation techniques might be successful on this site, would enable NE to make informed evidence led decisions as to whether a licence could be issued
- This does not mean a licence will be issued – if the research does not demonstrate success we would be unable to grant a licence.

National Highways

Is content that the proposal, if permitted, would not have an unacceptable impact on the safety, reliability and/or operational efficiency of the strategic road network in the vicinity of the site.

Notes that DDC may wish to seek a proportionate financial contribution towards the improvement scheme at A2 Whitfield Roundabout because of the cumulative impacts of developments coming forwards in the area and expected to use the strategic road network.

Active Travel England

Standing advice should be issued and would encourage the local planning authority to consider this as part of its assessment of the application. This standing advice is discussed within the highways assessment of the report.

Southern Water

The exact position of water main assets within access of the development site must be determined on site by the applicant in consultation with Southern Water. Clearance on either side of the water distribution main must be provided.

It is possible that a sewer now deemed to be public could be crossing the development site. Therefore, should any sewer be found during construction works, an investigation of the sewer will be required to ascertain its ownership before any further works commence on site.

The Environment Agency should be consulted directly by the applicant regarding the use of a private wastewater treatment works which disposes of effluent to sub-soil irrigation.

Under certain circumstances SuDS will be adopted by Southern Water should this be requested by the developer. Where SuDS form part of a continuous sewer system, are not an isolated end of pipe SuDS component, adoption will be considered if such systems comply with the latest design and construction guidance.

Where SuDS rely upon facilities which are not adoptable by sewerage undertakers the applicant will need to ensure that arrangements exist for the long-term maintenance of the SuDS facilities. It is critical that the effectiveness of these systems is maintained in perpetuity. Good management will avoid flooding from the proposed surface water system, which may result in the inundation of the foul sewerage system.

The Council's technical staff and the relevant authority for land drainage consent should comment on the adequacy of the proposals to discharge surface water to the local watercourse.

Investigations indicate that Southern Water can facilitate water supply to service the proposed development. Southern Water requires a formal application for a connection to the water supply to be made by the applicant or developer.

Stour Internal Drainage Board

Although the foul and surface water management proposals have yet to be finalised, we would expect engagement to continue and to be consulted with full details of the draft proposals in due course. One of our primary concerns is to ensure that there is no detriment to the aquatic environment from surface water discharge and treated effluent disposal. We would therefore hope to be involved with the evolving designs prior to their submission to the LPA for approval.

Although there is no draft drainage scheme presently available, the flood risk assessment recommends a surface water management scheme that relies on the rainwater harvesting and the discharge of surplus water to an existing watercourse (after treatment via permeable paving). We request that the detailed design (as requested by the LLFA) and suggested Conditions reflect these recommendations to achieve the relevant discharge standards with respect to rates and water quality.

Any works affecting adjacent watercourses or the network's water conveyance capacity will require our formal prior written permission of the River Stour Internal Drainage Board

We support the conditions request by KCC (as LLFA) in their letter of 9th November 2023 and request that a similar condition is attached to ensure that the foul is charge is appropriately considered.

The Coal Authority

The application site does not fall within the defined 'Development High Risk Area' and is located instead within the defined 'Development Low Risk Area'. This means that there is no requirement under the risk-based approach that has been agreed with the LPA for a Coal Mining Risk Assessment to be submitted or for The Coal Authority to be consulted.

KCC Flood Water and Management / Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

Minor alterations are noted for the entrance and overall layout of the building and as such a revised Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy report (August 2023-Issue 5 Revision 4) has been supplied. The drainage strategy proposed from the earlier revision remains the same. The surface water approach set out is for a rainwater harvesting tank to capture runoff from the roof area and a tanked permeable paving system for hardstanding areas (including car park). Outflow from the paving system will be managed through a flow control device (to meet greenfield rates), prior to an outfall into the adjacent watercourse.

No objections to the development, subject to conditions to secure final drainage details and subsequent verification.

KCC Highways and Transportation

No response has been received; but given the location and general amount of development is the same as in application 22/01152, it is reasonable to rely on previous comments:

Response 09/03/23 (earlier comments are on file)

No objection.

The parking provision has now been reviewed to provide a separate car park of 97 spaces (87 for guests and 10 for staff), and a separate pick up / drop off area. The remainder comprises a consolidation of the existing 770 Country Park spaces. This sees a removal of parallel configured spaces along the access route, which is considered a more appropriate arrangement. Pedestrian routes and crossing points have been illustrated, and the layout represents a safer and more appropriate route through the site. Data indicates that the existing site has a peak parking demand of circa 412 vehicles between 1400-1500 on a weekend. It is accepted that events at the Country Park result in an increase in visitor numbers.

The hotel adds a maximum of 10% parking stress, equating to 86 vehicles. The spa would see an additional maximum of 20 vehicles. The restaurant sees the smallest number of vehicle movements / parking stress, assuming that 25% of trips are not linked to hotel guests.

The hotel car park would be at its highest capacity overnight. A parking management plan and signage strategy should be secured by way of suitable conditions.

A draft Travel Plan has been submitted, which outlines measures to reduce single occupancy car use across the various site uses. This should be subject to reviews, with the applicant to pay a contribution towards staff time and monitoring. The Travel Plan should be secured by way of a suitable condition.

A cumulative impact assessment of both applications has been undertaken. The proposals would generate 125 two-way trips in the AM peak and 158 two-way trips in the PM peak.

Future scenarios suggest that the London Road / Mongeham Road junction will operate over capacity during the AM peak. The proposed trips would not be significant to represent a severe impact on the local highway network.

London Road / Manor Road roundabout already operates at capacity, with the London Road arms operating at capacity in future years. The proposal does not see any changes in the capacity or in future years, and therefore does not represent a severe impact on the local highway network.

The proposal would have an impact on the Northbourne Road arm of its junction with A256. A mitigation scheme has been proposed, indicating a flare on the minor arm of Northbourne Road to prevent vehicles waiting to turn right onto the A256. While the nature of the works may be considered minor, they would still require a Road Safety Audit as part of the Section 278 Agreement process. This would be a separate agreement with KCC Highways should planning permission be secured. The mitigation works see a decrease in the queue lengths at Northbourne Road.

KCC Public Rights of Way and Access Service

No objection - there are no public rights of way (PROW) affected by the proposed development.

Due to increased use on the surrounding PROW network, a s106 contribution of £100,000 is sought to include for quality all weather routes with a high level of signage and furniture encourages users to keep to the definitive alignment and therefore prevent "wandering" which could endanger habitats. The improvements would therefore promote responsible use and minimise the impact of the significant increased pressure on the Network that this development would bring.

Designing Out Crime Officer

No objection, subject to matters being secured by condition relating to boundary treatments, vehicle control measures, natural surveillance, lighting; specification of doors and windows, cycle and bin store security and consideration of CCTV and alarm systems.

KCC Fire and Rescue Service

Applicant should be aware that in the event of planning permission being granted, the Fire and Rescue Service would require emergency access, as required under the Building Regulations 2010, to be established. Fire Service access and facility provisions are a requirement under B5 of the Building Regulations 2010 and must be complied with to the satisfaction of the Building Control Authority. A full plan submission should be made to the relevant building control body who have a statutory obligation to consult with the Fire and Rescue Service

DCC Environmental Protection

Air Quality - An Air Quality Assessment has been submitted that examines the impact of the development in terms of the construction and the operational phase. Modelling

has been carried out to consider the impact of vehicle movement on existing residential receptors, concluding that for the operational phase any impact of an increase in nitrogen dioxide and particulate emissions is low and need not be considered further. This is accepted. The measures set out in the Air Quality Assessment on mitigation measures should be implemented.

For the construction phase, to control dust and noise, a construction management plan should be secured by condition to include noise, vibration and dust control measures, times of site operations; community complaints process, parking provision for site operatives, delivery and removal times and processes and a moratorium on burning of material.

Contaminated Land - The application information has been reviewed by the Council's contaminated land consultant who has recommended a standard contamination condition. They have also recommended that if foundation piling is required, further details will be required by pre-commencement condition.

DCC Place, Growth, Investment and Tourism

The report 'Economic Impact of Tourism – White Cliffs County – 2021 Results' measures the volume and value of tourism to the district. Tourism is worth over £201 million annually and supports over 4,500 jobs, but down from over £302 million annually in 2019 and supporting over 6,000 jobs before the pandemic.

This application would provide a major boost and sizable investment in the district and the visitor economy, which would further add to confidence in the locality, especially at this time of greater economic uncertainty and in relation to recovery from the impact of COVID-19.

Tourism is a vital industry across the district in terms of economic growth with the potential to grow much further. Tourism is recognised as a crucial driver for regeneration and the district's economy, and opportunities to explore and harness new projects should be encouraged.

Currently, Dover District's strongest market is the day visitor sector, welcoming over 3.7 million people annually in 2021 (down from over 4.2 million in 2019 before the pandemic); however, in comparison the overnight market is low with some 280,100 visitors annually (down from 424,000 in 2019). There is huge scope to grow the overnight market to convert some day activity to the short-break/staycation market that has been revived following the impact and restrictions of COVID-19. This feeds into the wider commitment to grow the economy generally across the district, as well as to endeavour to reduce district unemployment rates, youth unemployment rates and increase gross weekly earnings by place of residence. Dover District's current profile includes:

- The Office for National Statistics estimates that the GVA per head in the district is £21,559. This estimate is the sixth lowest in Kent (out of twelve) and the 19th lowest in the South East;
- Between January and December 2022, 74.0% of the resident working-age population were economically active. This means they were either at work or

actively looking for a job. This percentage is below the averages for the South East (80.7%) and Great Britain (78.5%);

- In April 2023, the unemployment rate in the district was 3.9%. This rate compares with 3.4% for Kent and 2.9% for the South East;
- Youth unemployment (18- to 24-year-olds) was 6.7%. This rate is higher than the averages for Kent (5.1%) and the South East (3.8%);
- For full-time workers, the average gross weekly earnings by place of residence are £670.30. This is lower than the average for the South East (£685.30) but above the average for England (£645.80);
- In the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation, the district ranked 113 out of 317 English local authority districts;
- 13.4% of residents in the district are income deprived. Five district Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are in England's top 10% most deprived. These LSOAs fall within the wards of St. Radigunds (40.2%), Town and Castle (28.7%), Buckland (28.6%), Buckland (27.9%), and Middle Deal (26.9%).

The Country Park's long term financial stability must be assured so it can sustain itself for current and future visitors to enjoy. It is understood that development would bring financial stability, viability and sustainability to the Country Park. The location of the site is well placed in relation to other tourist and recreation offers in the vicinity, including beaches, towns and renowned golf courses. The quality of the hotel and associated facilities would reinforce and expand this offer. There is a shortage of accommodation, especially mid-scale to luxury hotel stock in coastal regions and the wider area.

This proposal is in tune with Dover District Council's 'Corporate Plan' – objective one, 'Tourism & Visitor Economy Strategy' and 'Economic Growth Strategy' and is a recognised potential opportunity to fill a gap in the market. Such development will reinforce the district as an attractive visitor destination.

The applicant's economic benefits report is noted, detailing that the proposed hotel development will support investment, jobs, spending in the local economy and economic growth. In the context of the contribution the development would make towards the Council's corporate, tourism and economic growth strategies through investment, new jobs, experiences, opportunities and economic benefits for the wider district, Dover District Council's Tourism & Visitor Economy Department, part of Investment, Growth, Place & Tourism, supports this planning application.

DDC Heritage

No harmful impacts on any designated heritage asset.

DDC Ecology

Betteshanger Country Park boasts high ecological value, with the proposed development site supporting features of significant ecological importance, many of which have only come to higher awareness because of the developments proposed at the Country Park. The potential for impacts to these ecological features requires detailed consideration in the determination of the application, and there is also a need to look at the wider Country Park's ecological value and how this could be affected by the proposed development.

The proposed development has potential to result in varying scales of impacts to a range of ecological receptors present on and around the proposed development site.

Since the original application (22/01152) was first submitted, I have considered the applicant's identification of ecological impacts and the mitigation measures proposed, in the context of the need for there to be enough information for DDC to have adequate regard to these impacts as material considerations in the planning process, in accordance with Government guidance, planning policy and legislative requirements.

This has led to an iterative process; over time the applicant has provided clarification in response to my queries, along with additional and amended information. Through this process, some of the mitigation measures proposed by the applicant have previously been agreed by me as acceptable in principle, with the recommendation that the details and implementation of the measures are secured in the planning permission, if granted. These are summarised in table 1 below.

This advice note, dated 9th February 2024, takes into account my previous comments and, on the understanding that the application will shortly be determined with no further information to be provided by the applicant, this advice presents my final comments.

Table 1: Previously 'agreed in principle' mitigation measures for identified ecological impacts

Ecological receptor	Potential impact	Proposed mitigation
Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI / Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay Ramsar / Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI / Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA	Degradation of water quality as a result of contaminated surface water run-off / foul water discharge; impact on water quantity	<p>Pollution prevention measures (As specified in HRA) via CEMP.</p> <p>Ground investigations, risk assessments and remediation plan (if needed)</p> <p>Surface water management strategy.</p> <p>Foul water dealt with in existing on-site treatment plant.</p> <p>Water efficiency measures</p>
Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI/Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay Ramsar/Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA	Increase in recreational activity that disturbs birds that are part of the designations.	Financial contribution to Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy
Trees	Harm to retained trees during construction	Tree protection measures
Habitats, including priority habitats – reedbeds and ponds (Assessed by applicant as of local importance)	Loss / degradation	Habitat mitigation and compensation, including at least 10% biodiversity net gain

Bats - foraging and commuting (Assessed by applicant as of local importance)	Increase in lighting affects food sources (invertebrates) and bat use of the area.	Bat-sensitive lighting: adherence to Update Ecological Appraisal recommendations (MM7 – Lighting and Screening Strategy, and subsequent technical notes) and 'Guidance Note 08/23 Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night' (Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals).
Badgers (Assessed by applicant as of site importance)	Impact to badgers and a sett in close proximity to the site. Harm to individual animals during construction.	Update badger survey prior to commencement. Temporary closure of nearby badger sett during construction (under Natural England licence). Precautionary measures during construction - Biodiversity Method Statement
Water voles (Assessed by applicant as of local importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of individuals during construction.	Water vole mitigation strategy informed by detailed surveys (translocation to be subject to NE licence application)
Eurasian beavers (Assessed by applicant as of local importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of individuals during construction.	Detailed beaver surveys and mitigation strategy (if necessary).
Invertebrates (except fiery clearwing) (development site not considered to support an important invertebrate assemblage)	Loss of suitable habitat	No specific mitigation, landscaping to incorporate opportunities and features for invertebrates (planting, bee bricks, habitat piles) Precautionary pre-commencement survey for Sussex emerald moth caterpillars
Other mammals (priority species – hedgehogs, brown hares, harvest mice) (Assessed by applicant as of site importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of individuals during construction.	Precautionary measures during construction - Biodiversity Method Statement
Toads (priority species) (Assessed by applicant as of site importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of individuals during construction.	Precautionary measures during construction - Biodiversity Method Statement

Reptiles (Assessed by applicant as of site importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of individuals during construction.	Reptile mitigation strategy with habitat manipulation to displace reptiles from the site (with provision for updated surveys depending on time that has elapsed) and landscaping that includes habitat suitable for reptiles.
Other nesting birds (Assessed by applicant as of local importance)	Loss of suitable habitat / killing and injury of nesting individuals during Construction / disturbance from development and increased recreational activity	Precautionary measures during construction - Biodiversity Method Statement to ensure vegetation Clearance during bird nesting season is avoided, unless detailed

Additional matters to be secured:

- On-site habitat enhancement features (bat and bird boxes, log piles, native species planting) – secured in on-site landscaping / biodiversity enhancements.

Other matters

Fiery clearwing

Proposed mitigation: Habitat creation through seeding of docks onto receptor site, along with translocation of dock plants

The proposed development site provides habitat that supports a breeding population of fiery clearwing moths. This is a priority species, classified as Endangered on the GB Red list and is protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). As such, there will be a need for the applicant to seek a protected species mitigation licence in respect to the impacts to fiery clearwings as a result of the proposed development, if granted.

The fiery clearwing population of the Country Park as a whole is assessed by the applicant as of county importance. Given the restriction of this species to Kent, and the numbers recorded, in my view it is likely to be of greater importance than this.

Due to the limited available habitat within the proposed development site, it is concluded in the submission that habitat losses in respect to this application are unlikely to have a significant impact on the local population status.

A protected species mitigation licence would nonetheless still be required.

In accordance with Natural England's Standing Advice, DDC needs to "*be satisfied that if a licence is needed it's likely to be granted by Natural England or Defra before you give planning permission.*"

Natural England have not definitively stated that a licence would or would not be likely to be granted. Nonetheless, DDC must be satisfied as to whether a licence is likely to

be granted, and this can be done through considering the three licensing tests that will need to be met by the applicant:

- overriding public interest
- no other satisfactory solution
- not detrimental to the survival of the population.

The applicant has proposed, following Natural England's suggestion, a mitigation strategy involving seeding of fiery clearwing foodplants to establish suitable habitat in a receptor area. It is anticipated that fiery clearwings will colonise this compensatory habitat before destruction of the onsite habitat can take place. Translocation of foodplants (and any larvae present) to the receptor area is also proposed, along with an undertaking for long-term management and monitoring.

These aren't tried and tested methods that have been previously successful for this species, but they appear ecologically coherent and are in accordance with Natural England's suggested potential approach, such that it is possible that a protected species mitigation licence could be granted.

Turtle doves

Proposed mitigation: implementation of Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy

The turtle dove is a species of principal importance for biodiversity (priority species) that is the UK's fastest declining bird species in the country and listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List

The proposed development will bring the developed areas of the Country Park in closer proximity to known turtle dove territories and to previously agreed mitigation measures for turtle doves. There is potential for disturbance to the existing turtle dove population, and the expected turtle dove population (under the previously agreed mitigation for 20/00419), as a result of the expected increase in visitors to the Country Park.

The turtle dove population within the Country Park is assessed in the submitted ecological reports as of local to district importance.

Without an adequate and acceptable mitigation and compensation strategy, which also addresses the potential for the proposed development to affect the efficacy of the previously agreed mitigation, the impact to the turtle dove population within the Country Park will constitute significant ecological harm to a priority species.

I am concerned that the applicant's approach to mitigation, as outlined in the Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy, will not do enough to safeguard and enhance the turtle dove population of the Country Park.

There is a risk that there will be no expansion of turtle dove territories within the Country Park to compensate for the impacts at the Betteshanger Sustainable Park development site under application 20/00419. There is a risk that the 'predicted baseline' (an increase in existing territories as a result of the previously approved 20/00419 compensation measures) will not be achieved.

The submitted proposals focus on an aim to maintain the 'predicted baseline' to overcome the potential harm to turtle doves. In my view, a further aim should be to

increase turtle dove territories from the predicted baseline, taking into account the Country Park and the offsite mitigation areas. This would ensure accordance with the NPPF to “*pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity*” and the NERC Act Biodiversity Duty to “*conserve and enhance*” biodiversity.

I acknowledge that the adaptive management approach proposed by the applicant means that, in principle at least, there will always be further actions, secured in the planning permission (if granted), that can be taken to reach a point of ‘successful compensation’.

If planning permission is granted, it will be essential to ensure that the measures of successful compensation are clearly set out in the Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy and that, to ensure accordance with the NPPF and the NERC Act Biodiversity Duty, these must include an aim to increase the number of turtle dove breeding pairs from the predicted baseline.

Kent Wildlife Trust

Objects to the proposed development on the grounds that the hotel would undermine the consented turtle dove mitigation scheme (ref. 20/00419) as a result of increased recreational pressure from visitors. The hotel continues to be sited adjacent to an enhanced area of habitat which contains a supplementary feeding station and there are insufficient measures proposed to protect this site from disturbance.

A revised Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy has not been submitted. In the absence of an updated strategy to support this application, KWT remains unconvinced that such a proposal will be effective.

The revised layout of the hotel and its proximity to the two retained ponds will have a detrimental impact on priority species which utilise that habitat as a result of noise and light pollution. The submission does not appear to give any consideration to water quality impacts from contaminated surface water run off during both the construction and operational stage of the proposal. The lack of an updated lighting assessment means that it is not possible to assess the impacts of light pollution from the hotel on invertebrate populations.

Reiterates concerns raised under the previous submission in respect of the application site and the area of recently introduced hardstanding which was designated as a reptile translocation area by application reference 02/00905.

Previously consented biodiversity mitigation and compensation schemes at the country park have been disregarded by the current proposal. The historic and continued use of the Country Park to mitigate development elsewhere within the District would be undermined if the proposal were to be permitted.

In respect of turtle dove, KWT remain unconvinced that the applicant’s strategy will be effective. Proposals continue to undermine the consented turtle dove mitigation scheme (ref. 20/00419) because of increased recreational pressure from visitors in and adjacent to turtle dove mitigation and supplementary feeding sites. The hotel continues to be sited adjacent to an enhanced area of habitat which contains a supplementary feeding station. Noise and disturbance from the construction and operation of the hotel will significantly impact this area of habitat. KWT consider the measures proposed to protect this site from disturbance to be insufficient.

It is unacceptable for the goalposts for species mitigation to be repeatedly moved, with turtle dove being continually impacted by each new application brought forward in this area. The approach of squeezing species into more marginal areas of habitat, including to sites out of the country park, does not allow for those species to become established and to thrive which was the very purpose of the compensation strategy for reference 20/00419.

The additional documents provided still do not include ecology surveys or detailed pre- and post -development habitat maps for the proposed additional mitigation areas outside of the country park. As per the concerns raised by RSPB England, the type of habitat utilised by turtle dove will take a significant period to time develop and there is no guarantee that it will be successful within the off-site areas.

It is also of concern to KWT that the Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy is suggesting the idea of additional development within the core visitor area which sits adjacent to sensitive habitats and mitigation areas.

KWT continue to be concerned about the proposed mitigation and compensation measures for Lizard Orchid and the protected and rare moth species - Fiery Clearwing, Sussex Emerald, and Bright Wave. There is little evidence to suggest the proposed translocation of Lizard Orchid (present within the Seahive application site) or of larval foodplants for Fiery Clearwing (present on both application sites) will be successful. These concerns have been echoed by Natural England in their response letters as well as by other NGOs. KWT are of the view that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a high probability of the proposed translocations working.

It remains unclear as to whether any consideration has been given to water quality impacts from contaminated surface water run off during both the construction and operational stage of the proposal. This is of particular concern given the proximity of the proposed hotel to priority habitats.

The lack of an updated lighting assessment also means that it is not possible to assess the impacts of light pollution from the hotel on invertebrate populations.

The absence of comments on specific topics does not indicate a lack of concern or that our previous concerns have been satisfied by the submission of additional documents. KWT also continues to support the positions of other major conservation organisations who have been providing detailed responses on the two proposed developments.

Regard is had to additional information from the applicant titled Technical Note 18, Technical Note 19, and Technical Note 20

Significant concerns are still expressed in respect of impacts to lizard orchids, fiery clearwing moths, Sussex emerald moths and turtle dove, amongst other species.

RSPB

Response 04/10/23 & 30/10/23 & 01/02/24

Objects to this application as believes this development will be damaging to wildlife, especially turtle doves and other priority species including protected moths. Application, 23/01095, is very similar to the withdrawn one and has not adequately

addressed the significant concerns regarding scarce and legally protected wildlife, nor local and national planning policy requirements.

This proposed development is simply not appropriate for this location. It should be taken together with the surf lagoon proposal 22/01158, due to the combined impacts the related schemes will have on the biodiversity and complex habitats of Betteshanger Country Park and the wider region.

The plans have serious implications for turtle doves. Turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) is a RSPB priority species due to the significant population decline of this species both in the UK and across its breeding range. The turtle dove is the UK's fastest declining breeding bird and is threatened with global as well as national extinction (IUCN Red List of Endangered Species and UK Red List of Conservation Concern). Turtle doves are vulnerable to disturbance. The current hotel plans undermine the measures set out within the turtle dove Mitigation Strategy, set to satisfy the requirements of planning permission 20/00419. Unclear whether mitigation measures undertaken for housing under planning application 20/00419 for turtle dove at the Country Park have proved positive.

Remains unconvinced that the current application has changed significantly to safeguard the turtle dove population of the Country Park.

The land at Hammill, which is 6km from Betteshanger Country Park, should not be considered as mitigation for the proposals at Betteshanger Country Park. Land immediately east of the Country Park has been put forward for mitigation, but currently this is no detailed information on whether this is currently suitable for turtle doves. Only three breeding bird surveys have been carried out on the Country Park in summer 2021. Without further breeding bird survey data, it is difficult to assess the full extent that increased levels of recreation and disturbance will have.

Betteshanger Country Park is part of a network of sites that make up the Kent Downs and Stour Valley Important Invertebrate Area. Development would negatively impact this network of diverse coastal habitats and degrade their connectivity.

Rare moths are now known to be present across large areas of Betteshanger Country Park, including the proposed hotel location. Bright Wave Moth *Idaea ochrata*, and two protected species - fiery clearwing *Pyropteron chrysidiformis* and Sussex Emerald *Thalera fimbrialis* - have been found. Fiery clearwing eggs is very important, and their loss to a hotel would be serious. Any translocation plan for the hotel population would be fraught with risk. The Council should adhere to the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) hierarchy, choosing avoidance of harm above attempted mitigation.

Given the recent important findings for fiery clearwing at the surf lagoon and the hotel sites, it is difficult to see Natural England agreeing to any proposed translocation at the Country Park.

Regarding Sussex emerald moth, the exact habitat conditions favoured by the moth may not be so easy to find and depend on factors other than simply occurrence of the food plant, which is common nationally, yet the moth is highly range-restricted. If it were so straightforward, Sussex Emerald would not be rare and protected.

Does not agree that 'overriding public interest' has been demonstrated for the development, or that a suitable mitigation strategy can be developed to avoid impacts on the species and maintain its overall population status for Sussex Emerald.

The 2021 amendments to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in section 111 stipulate that licences for disturbing or moving protected wildlife must fulfil the following criteria: 3(a) that there is no other satisfactory solution, and (b) that the grant of the licence is not detrimental to the survival of any population of the species of animal or plant to which the licence relates. These criteria are unlikely to be met by the applicant. Betteshanger Country Park would appear to be a key link in an important chain of biodiverse sites across the area, including Pegwell and Sandwich Bay, supporting a nationally important invertebrate population.

Overview of the RSPB's stance: We reiterate our strong objection to both these planning applications. The RSPB maintains its views of 30 October 2023 in that we do not consider that the applicant has adequately addressed the significant concerns regarding vulnerable, rare, and legally protected wildlife, nor national planning policy requirements and Natural England's concerns. These proposed developments would be harmful at this location, due to the combined harmful impacts the related schemes will have on the complex biodiversity and habitats of Betteshanger Country Park and the wider region. We have reviewed the latest documents from Aspect Ecology, and they do not offer anything substantially new or convincing that would persuade us to change our stance from our earlier submission. While we briefly respond to some of the applicant's latest submissions, we reiterate there is no material change to our position, and we refer you to our objection as per our letter of 30 October 2023 and earlier responses. Below we refer to 'the applicant' and Aspect Ecology, representing the applicant, interchangeably

General comment – the applicant's plans are high risk and consistently opposed by wildlife experts.

Betteshanger's legally protected and nationally significant Fiery Clearwing population: the mitigation proposals are very likely to fail.

Sussex Emerald is a rare and protected species. Development cannot legally proceed without appropriate surveys.

Turtle dove mitigation proposals remain high risk and inaccurately include measures far off-site.

Third-Party Representations

A large number of representations have been received from individuals, interest groups and other organisations, which are summarised below (and available in full on the planning application section of the Council's website).

Representations of Objection

586 letters of objection to the proposed development have been received, raising the following summarised matters:

- Development is contrary to Policy AS2 which designates the Country Park for low key recreation only;
- The amended application has only minor / insignificant changes to the original application that was refused;
- Loss of a community asset. Development would not support strong and vibrant communities. The park should not be commercialised;

- Many local people use this park as one of the few tranquil green spaces in the area, a space where they can enjoy walking or bicycling in nature;
- Valuable open space. Loss of open space would be detrimental impact on people's mental health and wellbeing;
- The hotel is outside settlement boundaries and contrary to the emerging local plan;
- As nothing substantial has changed the earlier planning decision should stand. It is still the case that any purported economic gain is by far outweighed by the harms to the environment;
- Scale of the development is too big for the location;
- Development would be an environmental disaster;
- The Council needs to listen to the locals' voices;
- The Council should enforce S106 obligations to protect the Country Park as a nature reserve;
- The Country Park should be public green space and should be included in the Kent Country Parks initiative;
- Deal has enough tourism already;
- Deal has already been regenerated;
- The hotel will only provide low paid and poor-quality jobs;
- There are already hospitality jobs in the area that cannot be filled;
- There are plenty of hotels already / Deal is already well serviced by the hospitality sector;
- The hotel would only benefit rich / privileged people;
- The UK is currently the lowest 12 percent of Global countries and territories for biodiversity intactness;
- The site should be a SSSI;
- Many other former coal mine / pits are nature reserves;
- The proximity of the retained ponds to the hotel building risks significant disturbance to the water voles present there;
- Concerns over delivery of biodiversity net gain;
- The site is located within the reptile translocation area from the Betteshanger Grove application area;
- Negative effect on lizard orchids. Transplanting orchids invariably leads to their demise;
- Negative impact on the designated mitigation area for turtle doves relating to planning application 20/00419;
- Fiery Clearwing is a protect species – it would be harmed;
- Impact on rare moths present on the site;
- Detrimental impact on Skylarks and other rare birds;
- Impact on unique fungus species;
- Light pollution will be detrimental to wildlife;
- Contradictory to climate change emergency – will exacerbate effects and implications of climate change;
- Contrary to Dover Climate Change Strategy 2021
- Loss of important habitat;
- Devastating effect on the wildlife, including fungus, plants, beavers, reptiles, bats, turtle doves, skylarks, moths, toads, frogs, lizards etc;
- There is rare fungi;
- The Country Park is not being well maintained to an acceptable standard at present;
- Net negative effect on biodiversity;
- Taxpayers' money has been used in the creation of the Country Park;

- There are already a large number of activities taking place within the Country Park. These inappropriate events are not considerate to local wildlife;
- Concerns over stability of the land given its mining history;
- The site is a natural floodplain;
- There will be an increase in traffic – the A258 cannot cope;
- The Council should ensure planning decisions do not exacerbate traffic problems any further for residents - the application for the hotel and spa should therefore be refused;
- Already too much development in the local area;
- Road infrastructure needs improving before more development is allowed;
- The site is only accessible by car – it is not sustainably located and has poor Public transport connections;
- Air pollution/build-up of NO2 at London Road/Manor Road roundabout
- Foul drainage cannot cope, there is no credible solution for dealing with foul drainage;
- Infrastructure cannot cope (doctors, dentists, hospitals, etc);
- Unacceptable impact on demand for water when there is such a shortage of water in this part of east Kent already;
- Development will use a large amount of power;
- Unacceptable impact on landscape character;
- Harm to the visual appearance of the Country Park and surrounding area, including from lighting;
- High visual impact of the proposed hotel at the Country Park on the immediate and surrounding landscape, together with the light pollution arising from the development in a rural area designated as 'dark skies', is contrary to policy. the proposed development does not reflect Government guidance on light pollution;
- No information on how an 'uplift to tree quality across the site' will be secured.
- Development would be an insult to the heritage of the site;
- The hotel will result in noise and air pollution;
- The Council has a responsibility to ensure its policies and decision-making does not contribute to worsening air quality for the district's residents. The long-term health of residents cannot be sacrificed for the sake of an unnecessary and frivolous development;
- Irreversible impact;
- Unclear about where excavation soil and heavy metals would go;
- Non-essential development;
- Destroying future of the younger generations;
- Alternative sites that would be more suitable for the hotel to be located at
- Construction period would hugely impact on local residents;
- Impact on climate change and CO2 emissions
- Development will set an unwanted precedent to other schemes;
- Maintaining public access to the Country Park has nothing to do with planning
- Specific harm to Sussex emerald and bright wave moths
- Contaminated ground is a risk to health.

Friends of Betteshanger

A number of letters and representations have been received from 'Friends of Betteshanger'. The comments raised are as follows:

- There is a lack of an invertebrate survey when there is evidence of protected invertebrates on the site. Without this the Council is unable to assess the impact

of the proposed development on protected species, as required by Natural England;

- Object to the impact on protected species and the inadequacy of surveys and proposed mitigation;
- The Fiery Clearwing moth is present on the hotel site, fully protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act;
- Proposed mitigation and compensation re Fiery Clearwing moths will not be effective;
- The applicant has downplayed the importance of Fiery Clearwing moths;
- Other rare invertebrate species include 4 Lined Horse Fly; Norfolk Hawker Dragonfly; mottled Grasshopper;
- The survey for Water Voles is inadequate as the size and therefore the importance of the population has not been confirmed;
- 200m² of reedbed habitat will still be removed and the Voles will either need to be displaced or trapped and relocated. The population would not be sustained by the mitigation on offer;
- The Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy dated December 2022 highlights the impact that disturbance, as a result of the proposed developments, will have on birds at Betteshanger Country Park, and in particular on Turtle Doves. This downplays the amount of disturbance that wildlife, and Turtle Doves in particular, will suffer as a result of the two proposed developments;
- The disturbance caused by the Hotel is surely going to mean losing the Turtle Doves from this part of the Park. The addition of a third mitigation area is entirely inadequate as a solution for the loss of Turtle Dove territory at Betteshanger Grove and the likely loss of Turtle Doves at the Country Park;
- The addition of 9 acres adjacent to the Park has now been suggested but because scrub habitat can take 20 years to become suitable for Turtle Dove nesting this is not meaningful mitigation;
- Turtle Dove is the UK's fastest declining Bird species, its numbers having dropped by 98%. It is now vulnerable to extinction both globally and in the UK;
- Many other bird species are going to be negatively impacted by the proposed development. The access road to the Hotel would remove large areas of trees and scrub and pass through one of the greatest concentrations of breeding bird sites in the whole park;
- It is unacceptable that a translocated population of Reptiles would be disregarded and removed as is proposed under the hotel application.
- No amphibian survey has been carried out so the Council does not have adequate information to assess the likely impact on this species as required by Natural England;
- The proposed site is important for bats. Surveys are lacking in various respects. Even if sensitive lighting methods are employed bats are going to be detrimentally impacted;
- The hotel construction will have a negative and unacceptable impact on the badgers;
- Beavers are likely to be negatively impacted by the Hotel proposals as their presence has been recorded in the vicinity of the proposed hotel. No beaver survey has been carried out;
- Protected invertebrate species on the proposed Hotel site require a full invertebrate survey
- Over 30 different fungi have been recorded by local enthusiasts at Betteshanger Country Park including some nationally rare species such as the barometer earthstar. No fungi survey has been carried out by the developer;

- The impact of the two proposed developments (applications 22/01158 and 23/01095) on Habitats, Plants, Invertebrates, Reptiles, Mammals and Birds at Betteshanger Country Park which is one of Dover District's most important undesignated biodiversity sites. Development is contrary to the NPPF 2023, NERC 2006, Dover District Council policy and the new Local Plan;
- The arboricultural assessment is inadequate as no ecological value is ascribed to the trees. The young and semi mature trees to be removed from the proposed Hotel site are said to be 'readily replaceable at current age.' The success rate is poor and the after-care inadequate. Replacement is no substitute for trees that have been in the ground for years or which are self-set. The scale of tree removal, as a result of the proposed development cannot be justified at a time of ecological and climate emergency and is contrary to Dover Local Plan policy and the NPPF.
- Proposed mitigation for the fiery clearwing is the same as that failed on other sites. There is no evidence to show that significant harm to Fiery Clearwings can be addressed;
- Experimentally translocating Docks with a Schedule 5 species in the hope that it will work is not an appropriate way forward;
- Objection to the loss of open space. The Country Park should be for low key recreation and is protected in the draft Local Plan;
- Objection to development on an asset of community value;
- Objection to development being contrary to the draft Dover Green Infrastructure Strategy;
- Previous turtle dove mitigation areas are adjacent to the development;
- Loss of previous reptile receptor;
- Respective areas are being used for different mitigation / compensation schemes – there is no evidence that these areas can be layered in this way;
- How is the proposed mitigation to be monitored and enforced;
- Uncertainty surrounding the current monitoring of mitigation measures and the complexity of the proposed schemes does not give confidence that adaptive management will achieve the claimed goals and that the requirement of NPPF 180a will be met;
- No water management plan has been provided – surface runoff and foul water, taking account of the site as made ground with potential contaminants;
- Large engineering works would be required;
- More information is needed;
- Site cannot connect to public sewer;
- Development is financially unviable;
- Many other sites are more suitable;
- There is a global crisis in water supply, affecting the south-east of England;
- Proposed adaptive management does reduce uncertainty: monitoring of the mitigation schemes to date does not give confidence that much more complex schemes in the future will be monitored and adapted for a period of 30 years to achieve the required goals; no monitoring evidence has been provided to show that the mitigation scheme for Turtle Doves under planning application 20/00419 has achieved its goal to maintain and increase the population at Betteshanger Country Park;
- The provision of a 'nature conservation management plan' for areas of the park under planning applications 22/01158 and 23/01095 is not a material consideration neither can it justify a conclusion of no significant harm and/or adequate compensation because the applicant was under such an obligation in respect of the visitor centre development

- Since surveys were carried out by the applicant in 2020-2022 additional Invertebrates, including rare and protected species, have been recorded at Betteshanger Country Park. Further invertebrate surveys are necessary, prior to any decision being taken.

CPRE

Objects for the following reasons:

- The development would be in an unsustainable location only accessible by car;
- Destroy and harm local ecology, biodiversity and Priority Habitats;
- Highly likely to lead to the failure of the turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) mitigation nearby;
- Create light pollution, noise pollution and human/dog recreational disturbance;
- Out of keeping with the character of the local area;
- Damaging to the local landscape;
- Contrary to the original intentions for this site to be preserved for nature.

Regarding the Updated Ecological Appraisal:

- Reptile habitat has been lost by overflow car park, subject to enforcement action
- A negative great crested newt result does not mean absence;
- Reptile surveys are outside of optimum time;
- Priority habitat lies adjacent to the site;
- Development will negatively affect retained ponds;
- Increase in visitors and disturbance, along with recreational pressure, will negate any meaningful turtle dove mitigation;
- Bats are sensitive to lighting – important feeding corridors would be lost;
- Badgers are present and active within the Country Park;
- Despite survey work there may still be dormice;
- There is evidence of beavers to the north of the site;
- Water vole habitat is to be lost – one of the UK's fastest declining mammals;
- Hammill Field is too far to be of any meaningful benefit;
- Screening of internal lights cannot be relied upon;
- Lighting should be considered further;
- Development is impacting previous mitigation.

Regarding Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi

- For Fiery Clearwing, National England to decide on whether or not a licence is to be granted;
- The risk to translocation of docks is too great;
- Mitigation re Sussex emerald is needed;
- There will be significant harm to biodiversity.

Regarding Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy

- The Country Park is already relied upon for turtle dove mitigation – this is at risk from future development;
- The loss of scrub habitat is significant;
- It would not be possible to manage the number of people visiting the Country Park;

- Development will disrupt, disturb and shorten turtle doves feeding regime. No area of the park is safe.

The new application does not address the reasons the original scheme was refused. The Country Park is more biodiverse than anticipated, with many rare species. The Country Park should be there for the community and kept for nature and education, consistent with KCC's 'Making Space for Nature' initiative.

Regarding applicant's technical notes 19, 20 and 21:

- There is harm to fiery clearwing moths
- Bright wave moths are present on the site
- Sussex emerald moths are present on the site
- Effectiveness of proposal approach to turtle doves questioned
- Disagree with applicant's approach to lizard orchids

When considering the proposals for compensation for the Fiery Clearwing, Turtle Doves and Lizard Orchid, the applicant has not provided enough evidence to adequately assess the likely negative effect on these protected species

There can only be one sensible and legal decision - to refuse both applications

Buglife (03/10/23 & 31/10/23 & 06/02/24)

The application continues to inadequately assess impacts on invertebrate communities. The site forms part of the Kent Downs and Stour Valley Important Invertebrate Area, nationally or internationally significant places. The Country Park support a number of protected and threatened species, providing a unique area of open mosaic habitat (OMH) upon which they rely. This habitat can offer surrogate habitats and features to those that were one widespread.

The invertebrate populations of nearby Sites of Special Scientific Interest (5551) habitats are likely to use the unique features at Betteshanger as part of their complex lifecycles, highlighting the importance of Betteshanger Country Park within the network.

Buglife is aware of records from this year that the Endangered and Nationally Rare Fiery Clearwing Moth which is fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has been found within the development footprint for the hotel site. Recent survey work has also confirmed that the Betteshanger Country Park site now supports the fifth largest population of this species in the UK.

Sussex Emerald Moth also fully protected under Schedule 5 of the WCA, 1981 has been recorded on the wider site this year. The breeding status of this species on site and any potential impacts should be assessed prior to any decision being made.

There is a growing list of scarce and threatened invertebrates recorded at the Country Park as further surveys are undertaken, in addition to species previously known to be present such as the Nationally Scarce Southern Crablet Spider (*Ozyptila claveata*) and the Near Threatened and Nationally Rare Bright Wave Moth (*Idaea ochrata*), as part of an important site-wide assemblage. The proposals have continued to show no consideration for direct or indirect impacts on invertebrates.

No assessment has been made of how the effects of Artificial Lighting at Night will impact invertebrates, within the development area and the wider site. Reducing

impacts of lighting in this currently dark area should be a key element of the development design. Lighting impacts on protected species is a material consideration in a planning application and a full lighting strategy is required.

The site is part of the high-quality mosaic of habitats present within the Country Park, including areas of the Priority Habitat, Open Mosaic Habitat on Previously Developed Land (OMHPDL). The application fails to address that the application site does not exist in isolation, but that the mosaic of habitats it supports, such as scrub, reed beds and ponds are connected to and an integral part of the wider network of habitats of the Country Park.

Current information submitted for these proposals are insufficient to determine that there will not be significant adverse impacts on protected species and overall loss of biodiversity. Buglife believes this highlights that the applicant is failing to address the complexity of the wildlife issues inherent within the site and that it is further evidence that this is an inappropriate location for this development.

Buglife does not have confidence that the Visitor Management Strategy will adequately mitigate for the estimated 160% increase in visitor numbers, particularly in high use areas close to the development.

Technical Note 18 highlights the wide-ranging ecological issues that the applicant is attempting to address at this sensitive and biodiverse site. This includes proposals to recreate complex Priority Habitats and associated species alongside maintaining populations of protected species- indicating that Betteshanger Country Park is not the right location for this development. This site is identified as a Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) in The Dover Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Evidence Report³ (May 2022), identifying it as site of biodiversity importance that could play an important role for nature recovery in Kent. It is essential that sites of high wildlife value and in strategic locations to enhance the green infrastructure network are protected from inappropriate development.

Buglife reiterates that even if proposed translocations and habitat creation were successful, the future of the populations of the wider invertebrate assemblage remain in doubt within the context of a developed site. The negative effects of ALAN and a predicted 160% increase in visitor numbers cannot be fully mitigated for. Wider impacts on invertebrates beyond the site are also likely, as Betteshanger Country Park is important within a network of sites that form the Kent Downs and Stour Valley Important Invertebrate Area (IIA)⁴

East Kent Climate Action

A few changes have been made in this new application, but they do not go anywhere near satisfying the requisite environmental criteria. The upheaval of the building process, and, eventually the extra traffic, constant noise and artificial lighting at all hours would seriously disturb wildlife.

The importance for plant and wildlife of this site has been recognised by DDC in 2004, and it seems to be purely by some bureaucratic oversight that the land has not been designated a local nature reserve. The pollution involved in the building process and the subsequent increase in traffic would seriously impinge on the health and wellbeing of local people. Development would accelerate climate and ecological breakdown, rather than slow it.

In addition they state;

- There is no waste water management plan
- Chlorinated water, sewerage and quite possibly water contaminated by the many toxic and carcinogenic materials that are inevitably found in the spoil tip of a former mine, would have to be carefully managed, in collaboration with the water authorities.
- Potential risks to the health of public and of people working on the site. Nobody yet knows the true extent of the potential toxicity of the substances to be found on the spoil tip.
- Concern about the damage that would be caused by the developments to many species of flora and fauna, many of which are of national significance

Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory

Comments that the value of the whole of Betteshanger Park as a key bio-diversity site, in local, regional and in some respects, national terms, has already been demonstrated by numerous responses to the applicant's previous development submission. The application does little to substantially address the concerns expressed at that time by many wildlife and environmental organisations.

The Trust remains unconvinced about the practicality of such mitigation measures that are suggested, such as translocation of Lizard Orchids and the overall assertion by the developer of 'net biodiversity gain' as a result of the proposed work. There seems to be a limited grasp of what 'environmental benefits' actually might mean.

Deal With It – Transition Deal

Comments that this a wildlife area, supporting many species which is, in itself, is a good enough reason not to destroy it but while visits to green spaces are so important for mental health, particularly at these times of stress, it is a vital resource.

Representations of Support

656 letters of support for the proposed development have been received, making the following comments:

- There is limited amount of employment within Deal so the provision of jobs is needed;
- Deal has no 4/5 star hotels;
- Boosting tourism and the evening economy;
- Environmental impacts can be justified;
- The proposed development will assist in putting Kent on the map;
- The site is brownfield land;
- The proposed development will lessen the need for air bnb's, thus freeing up housing;
- Beneficial for sporting activities;
- Hotel will not impact on local amenities;
- Hotel will not impact on traffic;
- Need to keep up with the exponential growth of Deal;
- Essential for large events;
- Infrastructure should be built alongside the development to futureproof against possible issues (e.g. congestion);
- Lack of quality hotels is a barrier to the wider tourist industry;
- Hotel development would support the financial future of the Country Park and mining museum;

- Limited to a small part of the Country Park;
- Hotel will benefit Country Park in the winter months;
- Need more modern spa facilities;
- Essential for the area;
- Rejection of application would send a clear message to those looking to invest within the local area.

Visit Kent

Visit Kent is the official Destination Management Organisation for Kent championing the county's £4.1bn tourism industry and supporting more than 81,000 jobs prior to the pandemic. It monitors the trends in the visitor economy to support a sustainable recovery for the sector and in our opinion this development would enhance the tourism offering that the county has for visitors, as well as providing leisure and wellbeing facilities for residents in the local area.

Tourism is worth over £302m to the Dover District economy, it supports over 6,000 jobs and in pre-Covid the area attracted over 4.7m visitors. A study into the supply and demand of accommodation stock conducted by Canterbury Christchurch University showed a gap in accommodation provision across the county. Specifically in the Dover District, the report identified priority gaps in the provision of 4-star + hotels with 100+ bedrooms and spa hotel accommodation which would help to maximise the local benefits of facilities such as Discovery Park and groups visitors to local attractions, including the district's world-class golf courses.

Accommodation of this scale and quality is needed for both spectators and staff for The Open golf championship when it returns. This will not only maximise the benefits of the championship for the local area, encouraging more people to stay longer and spend more, but provide a year-round offer driving significant economic growth to the area and a high-quality amenity for residents.

The delivery of a hotel of this calibre would represent a step-change in the county's visitor economy, creating jobs and growth and a much needed boost to one of Kent's leading industries following the challenges of the pandemic.

White Cliffs Country Tourism Association

When SEEDA took over the management of the land and projects it was going to be designed for everyone wildlife and nature, health and wellbeing, tourism and light industries and would be a huge boost to the local economy. These ambitious plans would mean that Betteshanger would be sustainable and be here for many generations. We should not be looking for things in order to reject the applications. We should be looking for ways to allow these plans.

A quality hotel, which is much needed in our area which will boost tourism, attract a wider range of visitors who will visit not only Betteshanger but other places of interest in our tourism offer. I am sure local people will also be employed at the hotel. Betteshanger Colliery was just a huge grey mass with coal dust and residue and rusty metalwork with crumbling buildings. It is now a vast area of green, an impressive Mining Museum, a wonderful cycle track and route. wildlife walks and a lovely cafe/restaurant building which is also great for meetings and conferences and even weddings and social events. It also has a great playground and puts on great events. However, it needs to be financially sustainable. We do not boast enough quality hotel accommodation.

R&A

Whilst The Open continues to grow in popularity as one of the world's greatest sporting events and brings significant economic benefits to the locality, the availability of high-end accommodation is an ever pressing issue. This leads to accommodation being sourced elsewhere, often beyond Dover district, where others capture the economic benefits. The proposed development would present opportunities for the R&A, along with other patrons, official suppliers and partners in close proximity to Royal St George'. There would be a significant opportunity to strengthen the attractiveness of golf related tourism within the region and help the local area capture the associated economic benefits.

Royal St George Golf Course

Provision of high end accommodation is missing in South East Kent, and it is essential to invest in this form of accommodation. The benefits to the local economy are wide ranging and South-East Kent should be aspiring to provide the finest hospitality experience and the proposed development will go a long way to achieving this goal. Enhancing the accommodation experience in this region has a wide ranging impact on the ability to continue to attract the Open Championships and future world class events. It should not be underestimated that the local economic benefits are far reaching, and this application will cement Kents reputation of attracting the major golf championships.

Princes Golf Club

Kent is bereft of high-end accommodation and the offering of a 5 star hotel will attract a different type of clientele. These guests will not only support the local golf clubs but other amenities such as restaurants and shops. We have in the past lost out to the north-west coast when trying to attract high spending clients due to the lack of quality accommodation in Kent.

Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club

There are three first rate golf courses in Sandwich and Deal in Royal St George's, Prince's and Royal Cinque Ports and all three continue to host prestigious national and international competitions on a regular basis and attract visitors who would make use of the new facilities as opposed to having to travel some distance to find comparable accommodation. The proposed development would act as a stimulus to golf tourism in the area and help secure the wide-ranging benefits set out in the socio-economic statement accompanying the application.

f) 1. The Site and the Proposal

The Site

1.1 The application site is located within Betteshanger Country Park ("**the Country Park**"), ("**the Site**"). The Site consists of:

- the existing access and roadway into the Country Park from the A258;
- land between the roadway and existing car park, and adjacent to the car park's northern edge;
- land adjacent to the north-east of the existing car park; and
- the existing roadway adjacent to the southern edge of the car park.

1.2 The Site is identified at Figure 1.

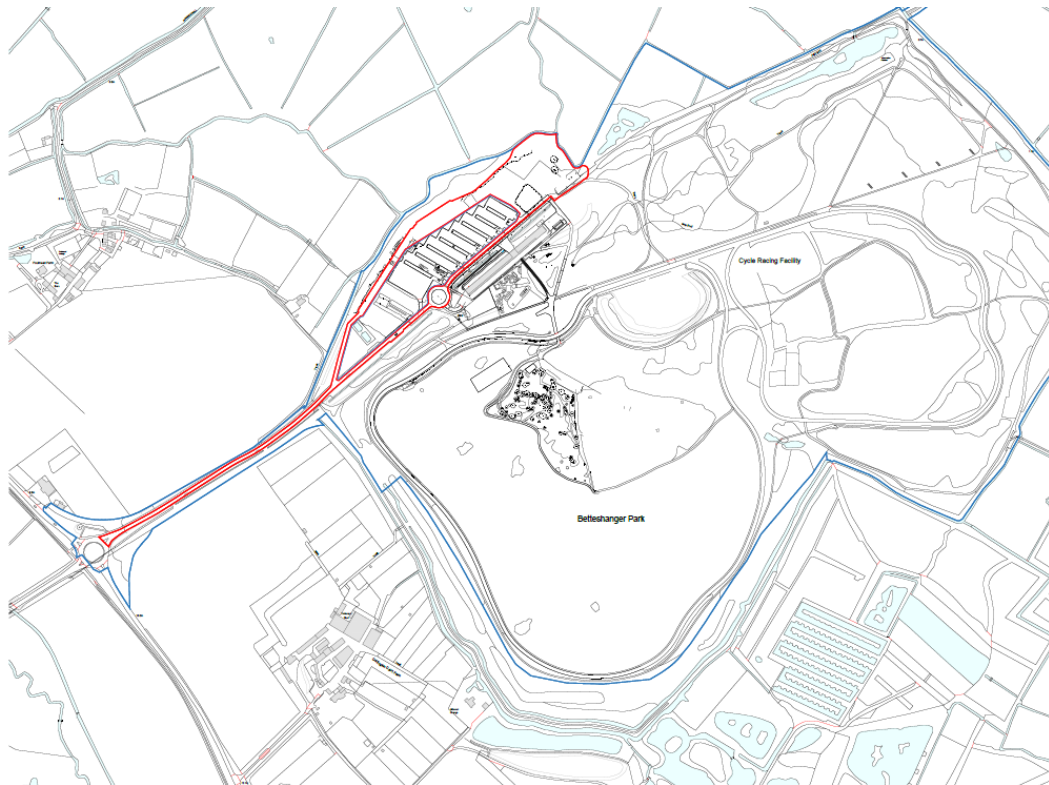


Figure 1: Existing Site

- 1.3 The Site is located adjacent to the existing car park within close proximity to the 'developed' part of the Country Park that consists of the visitor centre, Kent mining museum, café/ restaurant and events space and children's play area.
- 1.4 The land to the west and north of the existing car park is vegetated by mixed scrub, and grassland as well as containing a number of trees. The land to the north-east of the car park is a mix of bare or sparsely vegetated ground, mixed scrub, bracken, tall ruderal vegetation and reedbed. It also contains three ponds and a number of groups of trees, which are young to semi-mature with a variety of species. The Site is bound to the north and north-east by a ditch and established mature tree line.
- 1.5 There is a notable change in level between the existing main car park (of circa 2.5m to 3m AOD) and the land within the site to the north-east (of circa 4.5m AOD).
- 1.6 The hardstanding on the land to the north-east of the car park is subject to an enforcement investigation as to whether or not it is authorised in planning terms.

Betteshanger Country Park

- 1.7 Betteshanger Country Park is a privately owned, popular Country Park (240,000 visitors last year) with facilities including a visitor centre, mining museum cafe/ restaurant. The park opened in 2007 and was at that time known as Fowlmead.
- 1.8 The Country Park covers a much larger area than the Site, broadly measuring about 85ha or some 1.34 km east-west by 1.1 km north south. Across the Country Park there is a network of walking and cycling paths / trails amongst areas of habitat including open grassland, woodland, ruderal vegetation, scrub, wetland and open mosaic.

- 1.9 The Country Park was formerly the spoil tip of the Betteshanger Colliery coal mine that closed in the late 1980s. The loss of this industry and the economic and social consequences led to the South-East England Development Agency (SEEDA) acquiring the site, to invest in its regeneration to stimulate renewal and growth. SEEDA submitted a planning application (02/00905) for the masterplan led redevelopment / regeneration of both the Betteshanger Colliery spoil tip and pit head site located to the west of the A258. This established the Country Park, which has evolved from that original scheme to what it is today.
- 1.10 Following SEEDA disbanding, Hadlow College acquired the site but were placed into administration in 2019 following which the Country Park was purchased by the current owners. Since the Country Park being acquired by the current owners, the visitor centre has been completed.
- 1.11 The Country Park is designated as open space by policies of the Core Strategy and draft Local Plan. The Country Park generally is within flood zone 1 (reflecting its raised spoil tip landform) except for its northern section containing the Site that is within flood zone 2 (in main) with a smaller part in flood zone 3. The Country Park does not include any heritage designation; is not within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty / National Landscape; nor is covered by any specific wildlife/ecology designation.
- 1.12 The Dover Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy Evidence Report (May 2022) presents that the Country Park is able to “*offer considerable opportunities for leisure and recreation for Deal, Walmer and the wider district. It could help to attract visitors away from coastal areas where there is high pressure on protected nature conservation sites.*”
- 1.13 Representations received question whether the Country Park should be designated a local nature reserve through obligations of the section 106 agreement of planning permission 02/00905. The Council has reviewed this matter, including seeking clarification from the owner of the Country Park as to its position on the possibility of granting the Council a legal interest in the land. The owner of the Country Park has made it clear it is not willing to discuss granting any such interest to the Council, nor does it agree for the land to be designated a local nature reserve. This is significant because, notwithstanding that the section 106 agreement of planning permission 02/00905 runs with the land and binds successors in title, the agreement as to the designation and management of the nature reserve land is revocable should the owner make such a decision³. Accordingly, the Council may not designate land in which it has no legal interest if no agreement exists between the landowner and the local authority to do so.
- 1.14 Other obligations of the 02/00905 section 106 agreement include that any development at the Country Park would need to be approved in writing by the Council (such as through the grant of planning permission) and that such approval to not be withheld (in the context of the section 106 agreement) providing such development would not cause or give rise to unacceptable damage to the wildlife value of the land. Matters of ecology are considered further in the assessment section of this report.

³ Section 19(3) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 makes it clear that a local authority must de-declare land which is the subject of a nature reserve declaration when an agreement ceases to be in force. The Government guidance on setting up and managing a local nature reserve explains that a landowner may reclaim designated land and that the local authority must, in such circumstances, de-declare the land as a local nature reserve

Asset of Community Value

- 1.15 The Council received on 30 April 2023 an application by Sholden Parish Council to nominate the Country Park as an Asset of Community Value with regard to provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and the Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012. The Council determined in June 2023 that it considers the Country Park furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community, and it is realistic to think it can continue to do so and as such the Country Park should be included within the Council's list of Assets of Community Value.
- 1.16 The identification of the Country Park as furthering the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community is a material consideration in the assessment of this planning application. The listing of the Country Park as an Asset of Community Value affords certain provisions intended, generally, to allow a community interest group time to seek to acquire the Country Park should the owners seek to dispose of it (in part or in full). In these circumstances, it is important to note that should a community interest group make an offer to acquire the Country Park, it remains at the discretion of the vendor as to whether or not they would wish to accept that offer. The vendor is under no obligation to sell the asset to a community group or any other person. The provisions relating to disposal of the Country Park are not considered material in the assessment of the planning merits of the proposed hotel.

Surrounding Area

- 1.17 Deal/Sholden is the closest settlement to the Country Park at a distance of approximately 2.4 km as the crow flies (from centre of Deal to the centre of the Country Park). As well as walking and cycling routes via the A258, a number of public footpaths connect the urban area of Deal/Sholden to the Country Park. Bus services between Deal and Sandwich route along the A258 with stops about 15 minutes walking distance of the Site.
- 1.18 Across an area that arcs east-west to the north of the Country Park, and on separate land adjacent to the south, is the Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Ramsar. This land is also designated as the Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI; and its western section is part of the Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area. Along the coastline, within a distance of approximately 1km of the Country Park is the Sandwich Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 1.19 The landform / topography to the north and east of the Site / Country Park is generally low lying and flat.

Proposed Development

- 1.20 Planning permission is sought for a hotel with associated facilities including a spa, gym and restaurant / bar to be constructed on the Site to the north-east of the existing car park. This is a resubmission following a resolution to refuse a similar scheme in July 2023.
- 1.21 The key changes from the previous scheme (application reference 22/01152) are that part of the building at lower ground floor, projecting beyond the main south-eastern elevation has been reduced in size so to enable the retention of two ponds. The applicant also intends, as additional measures, to (i) deliver habitat enhancement (foraging habitat, strengthening of boundary hedgerows and creation of new ponds) for turtle doves on land adjacent to the east of the Country Park from commencement of development; and (ii) increase the area of restrictive access within Country Park for

ecological reasons. In addition, the applicants have submitted a public access statement which states they will covenant to maintain public access to the Country Park all the time the hotel/ spa facility remains operational. It further commits to charging no entry to the park, although existing parking and other facility charges will remain. This is a legal commitment that is currently not in place. As matters stand, the owner could choose to either close the park to the public or charge an entry fee.

- 1.22 The main hotel building would comprise two wings each measuring 17.8m wide, 86m and 80m in length, and rising to a gable height of 15m with a pitched roof. The elevations can be viewed at Figure 2 and Figure 3 below. Between the two wings would be a third structure to enclose an entrance lobby and central atrium space. This too would have gabled front and rear elevations, rising to slightly lower apex and pitched roof height of 13m. There would be a stagger between the position of the three front and rear gables – the northern wing is set most forward with a set back to the central element and a further set back to the southern wing. The total width of the front elevation would measure 53.4m.

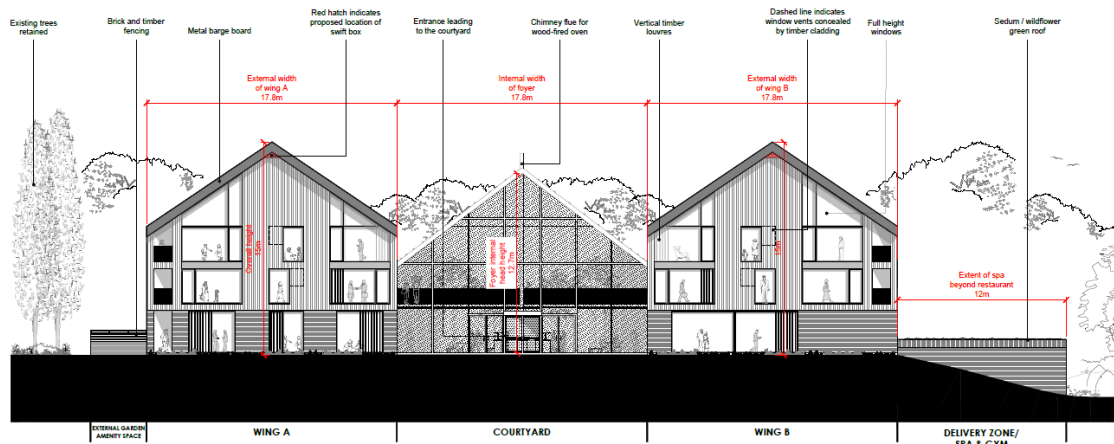


Figure 2: Proposed Front Elevation

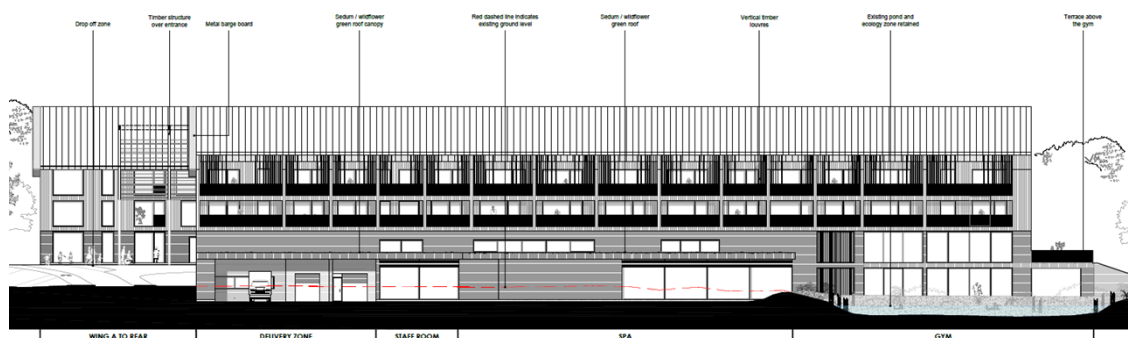


Figure 3: Proposed Side Elevation

- 1.23 Adjoining the south-eastern side of the main structure at lower ground floor level would be a rectangular shaped building (measuring some 12m by 58m) containing a delivery area and spa, which could connect to a basement area below the south-eastern wing containing a gym and associated facilities, plant rooms, storage and staff facilities.
- 1.24 The proposed materials and detailing of the hotel development include:

- expressed timber frame for central gabled structure, to provide entrance and central atrium;
- expressed overhang on front elevation gables;
- black aluminium window frames;
- full height windows from floor to ceiling;
- deep reveals between the exterior plane of the elevation and windows;
- vertical wooden louvres on windows for shading;
- inset balconies to not disrupt silhouette of building; and
- wooden louvres to enclose upper floor balconies.

1.25 The proposed layout of the hotel development is at Figure 4 and the layout in the wider context of the Country Park is at Figure 5.

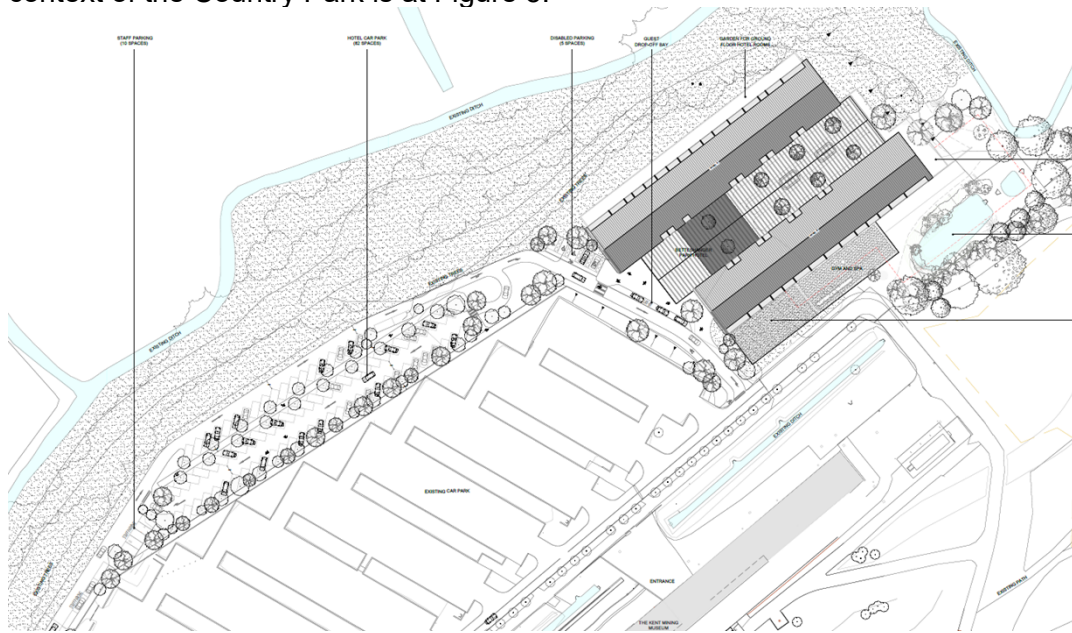


Figure 4: Proposed Layout

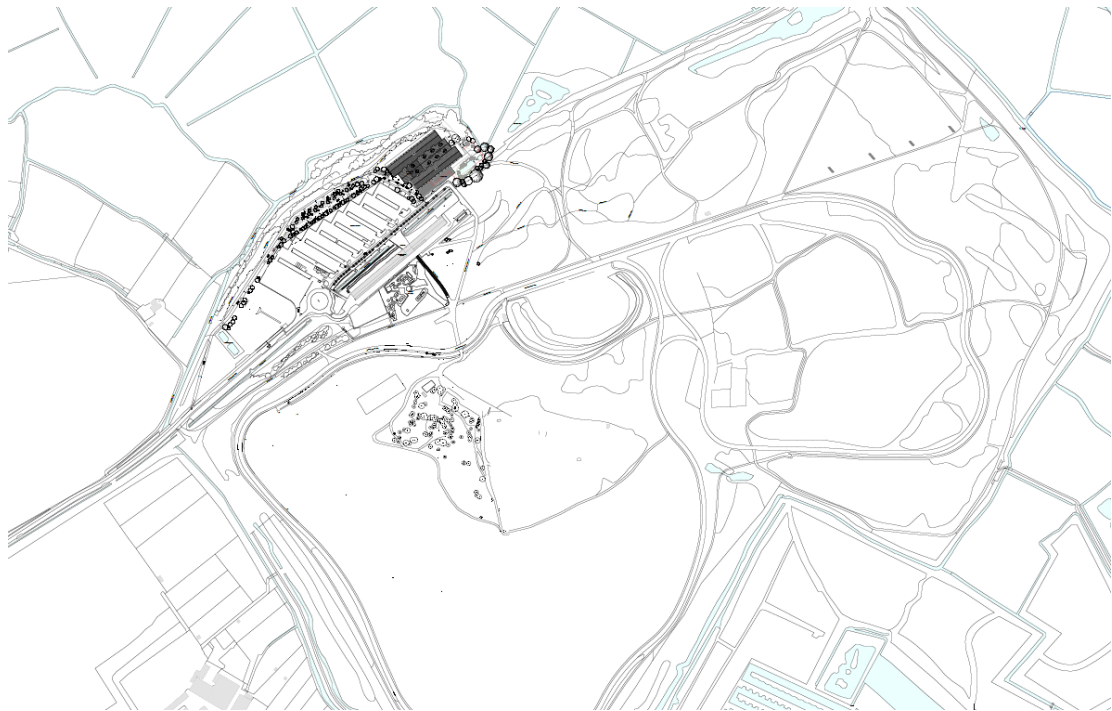


Figure 5: Proposed Layout in Wider Context

1.26 Describing the function/arrangement of the building in more detail:

- the main entrance would be positioned within the central gable, set back from the main roof to provide a canopy, and facing south-west toward the existing car park;
- beyond the entrance the ground floor would contain a lobby and reception; seating / lounging space within the atrium; bar, restaurant and kitchen facilities; meeting / conference rooms; and toilets;
- at lower ground floor level the gym and spa would include a swimming pool, changing facilities, and treatment and yoga rooms; and
- 120 bedrooms would be located within the two wings at ground, first, second and mezzanine/third floor levels. Outer facing rooms would benefit from an external terrace (ground floor) or inset balcony (upper floors). Inner facing rooms would have an outlook across the atrium, with those at second floor level having a balcony. 22 rooms would have a duplex arrangement split between the second and third/mezzanine floors.

1.27 The proposed ground floor plan of the hotel scheme is at Figure 6.

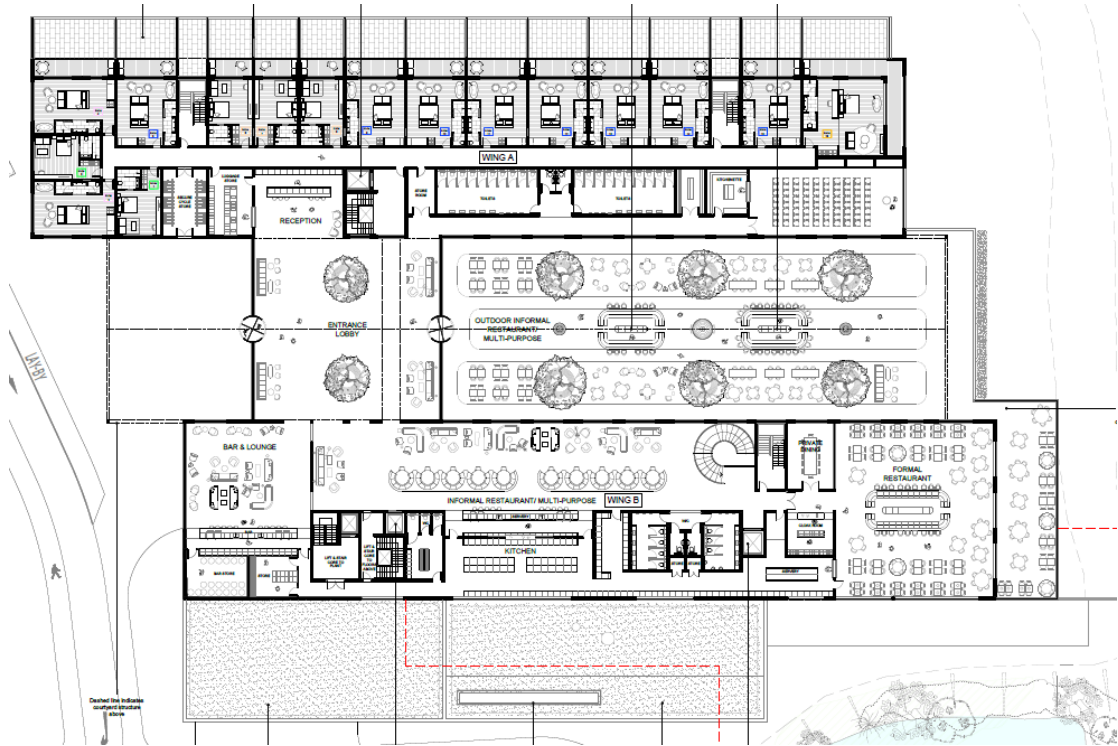


Figure 6: Proposed Ground Floor

- 1.28 Elevations of the hotel building are at Figure 5 & 6 and a computer generated image of the hotel is at Figure 7.



Figure 7: Image of Hotel Scheme

- 1.29 External works would include a new roadway off the current main Country Park access; and an additional car park (97 spaces including five disabled bays) adjacent to the

north of existing parking facilities. There would be a dedicated drop off area close to the hotel's main entrance, from where vehicles would loop back to the existing roadway south of the car park. A dedicated delivery area in the undercroft of the lower ground floor, to the south-east of the main hotel building would also be provided.

- 1.30 Landscaping would include tree planting within the new car park and around the perimeter of the hotel building, as well as green roofs over the lower ground floor building. Further landscaping details would be secured via condition.
- 1.31 As well as the existing and proposed plans and elevations, the following documents accompany the application:
- Design and Access Statement
 - Air Quality Assessment
 - Arboricultural Impact Assessment
 - Archaeological Assessment
 - Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy
 - Flood Risk Sequential Test
 - Heritage Impact Assessment
 - Phase 1 Land Contamination Assessment
 - Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) and Addendum
 - Noise Assessment
 - Statement of Community Involvement
 - Transport Assessment
 - Topographical Survey
 - Hotel Sequential Test
 - Hotel Transport Response Note (including Framework Travel Plan)
 - Ecology information as detailed below in this report
 - Public Access Note – that public access at nil cost to the Country Park would be secured
 - Socio Economic Benefits Assessment – this provides a socio-economic benefits assessment of the scheme as considered below
 - Financial Summary Report – this outlines the current revenue channels of the park
 - Planning Statement – outlines the background to the site and the proposal and highlights the social and economic planning benefits
- 1.32 The content/conclusions of these documents are further considered in the assessment section of this report below.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 The proposed development offers significant public and economic benefits. However, the Site is located in the countryside within a sensitive ecological setting. These matters, amongst others, must be weighed and balanced in coming to a decision. Below, the main planning issues relevant to the consideration of the scheme are presented then considered in this assessment:
- Planning Committee resolution of application 22/01152
 - Tourism and the visitor economy
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Assessment

Planning Committee Resolution of Application 22/01152

- 2.2 In making a decision on this application, regard must be made to the resolution of the Planning Committee in July 2023 to refuse planning application 22/01152. The full resolved reasons for refusal are set out in history section of this report above. In summary, it was resolved to refuse planning permission on two grounds – the first relating to the loss of designated open space (identified as an Asset of Community Value) and change to its character and appearance; and the second in relation to the impact upon habitat that supports a population of turtle doves.
- 2.3 This resubmitted application seeks to overcome the previous resolution by making changes to the application including:
- reducing the size of part of the building to enable the retention of two ponds;
 - the delivery of habitat enhancement (foraging habitat, strengthening of boundary hedgerows and creation of new ponds) for turtle doves on land adjacent to the east of the Country Park from commencement of development;
 - an increase to the area of restrictive access within Country Park for ecological reasons;
 - a legal commitment (set out in the Public Access Note) that the applicant will covenant to maintain public access to the Country Park for the time the development is operational; and
 - a legal commitment that entry to the Country Park would be free of charge (existing parking and other facility charges would remain).
- 2.4 For clarity, these legal commitments are not currently in place – as matters stand, the owner could choose to close the Country Park to the public or could introduce an entry fee.
- 2.5 The applicant has also provided a Financial Summary Report with this resubmitted application – to set out its position that the Country Park is financially unsustainable and that additional revenue and diversification of the Country Park is necessary to avoid the risk of it closure (noting that it is solely in private ownership). It sets out that the income generated by the development would help ensure the County Park’s long term, sustainable future.
- 2.6 These matters are assessed further in sections below.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy

- 2.7 The Framework states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It identifies an economic objective (alongside social and environmental ones) as one of three strands to achieving sustainable development - recognising the importance of a strong, responsive and competitive economy.
- 2.8 The challenges facing Dover District's economy are highlighted in the Core Strategy (paragraph 2.67) - the district's economy lags behind other parts of the county, is polarised between low and higher value businesses and has an underdeveloped tourism sector with the district seen as a transit location rather than a destination.
- 2.9 The Core Strategy expands on matters relating to tourism (paragraph 2.45), setting out that visitor spend is lower than Kent's average and visits to some key attractions and overnight trips by overseas visitors have declined. It identifies that the lack of a destination hotel is one reason why tourism is underachieving its potential. It presents the considerable opportunity to encourage economic growth through tourism, including by improving the overall hotel offer (including with an upper/mid-range hotel of around 200 bed spaces) and better promotion of the district's historic and natural assets (paragraph 3.25).
- 2.10 The Council's more recent 'Growth strategy for tourism and the visitor economy 2020 to 2030' presents the current state of visitor facilities and services, stating that there is a shortage of quality hotel stock available – especially 4* and 5* accommodation with food & drink facilities and large-scale conference/meeting and event spaces. It seeks to facilitate new hotels and attractions to help boost the number of visitor day trips, number of overnight stays, duration of stays, visitor spend and level of satisfaction.
- 2.11 The draft Local Plan advances the economic objectives of the 'Growth strategy'. Its overarching vision and strategic objectives identify tourism as a key sector of a prosperous economy. Strategic Policy SP6 encourages development that would extend or upgrade the range of tourist facilities.
- 2.12 The importance and value of tourism development to the district is emphasised in the consultation response from the Council's Head of Place, Growth, Investment & Creative Services, which supports the hotel proposal in recognition of Dover District's economic profile and due to the contribution he considers it would make towards investment, jobs and spending in the local economy leading to economic growth.
- 2.13 The figures provided in the letter are striking in showing the significance of the reduction in the tourism sector (falling by some £100 million in two years) and the shortage of hotel accommodation, particularly for mid-scale to luxury hotels.
- 2.14 The application is supported by economic and financial information that outlines the benefits of the development, identifying that it would support investment, jobs, spending in the local economy and economic growth. It also seeks to demonstrate the significant benefits of the proposal both directly and more widely to the local economy. These include:
- the creation of some 75 new gross direct jobs and some 204 indirect jobs once development is operational;
 - total workplace salaries of some £2.3 million annually;

- some £8.5 million gross value added (per annum) to the local and wider economy;
 - an estimated £8 million per year from overnight visitor spending;
 - construction phase direct and indirect jobs and gross value-added economic activity to the local and wider economy.
- 2.15 The Financial Summary Report predicts a return of 15% on rent of the land in respect of the hotel development. The applicant's Planning Statement estimates the proposed development would generate around £22.6 million in construction income with a further 8.5m GVA for the south-east economy.
- 2.16 The submitted information provides detail on the level of jobs the proposal would create, identifying 75 direct jobs in peak season and a further 204 indirect jobs. This is a significant contribution to the workforce and would provide a range of skilled and non-skilled job opportunities within the Dover district, which is to be welcomed, particularly as it is identified within Dover's economic profile that the district has a higher than average unemployment rate for the south-east, particularly when considering youth unemployment.
- 2.17 The forecast financial information highlights that this level of investment in an identified area of need for a 4/5* hotel in the district would result in significant economic growth, providing a much needed boost to the local area. The Dover district tourism industry has shrunk since 2019, with fewer visitors and less income, yet it is identified that there is potential for growth.
- 2.18 If considered in combination with the proposal for the wave lagoon, the proposal would be very likely to draw in an even wider catchment of visitors from outside the district.
- 2.19 The sizeable investment would also likely provide confidence to the visitor-led economy and offer opportunities for linked investment in the surrounding area.
- 2.20 As such, it is considered that the proposed economic benefits to the local area and the wider district would be significant. The proposal would fill an identified gap in the tourism sector, encouraging visitors to the area as a result. This in turn would have a ripple effect on the wider economy with visitors spending money both on site and further afield in the surrounding towns of Deal and Dover.
- 2.21 The economic benefits realised from the development are considered significant and this is a material consideration that weighs in support of the proposal and meets one of the tests of the 'golden thread' running through the Framework in respect of meeting sustainable development.

Benefits of the Scheme to Betteshanger Country Park

Financial information provided for Betteshanger Country Park

- 2.22 This resubmitted application highlights the role and value of the hotel development in providing a sustainable income source to the Country Park to ensure its long-term financial future. Currently, income streams to the Country Park consist of food and beverage, parking, outside events, indoor events (such as weddings and birthdays), bike hire, site rental, activities and school bookings. The submitted Planning Statement explains (para 1.6) that;

“The Country Park is currently operating at a loss and the proposed additions to the park are required to secure the longevity and viability of the country park. If the diversification plans cannot be realised, the Park will likely fail and close to the public” resulting in the loss of over 40 jobs.

- 2.23 Providing further context, the Financial Summary Report explains that;
“Since the park was purchased from the administrators, £3.2m has been put into Betteshanger Property Ltd to purchase the land and build the visitors centre and £631k has been put into the operating company to set up the management of the park and keep it open.”
- 2.24 The Financial Summary Report provides details of the Country Park’s turnover, profit and loss for the past three year-ends and outstanding creditor balances and reserves. It concludes that, as things stand, the park is projected to lose £582k per annum with a deficit of £1.8m by the end of 2026.
- 2.25 The applicant has explained that the running costs of the park, on wages alone, amount to £522,823 per annum (from 2022 accounts), which include nature management, health and safety and security roles. In addition, the insurances required for the site amounted to approximately £32,000 in 2021-22. The submitted accounts show that the site is currently operating at a loss with significant visitor numbers.
- 2.26 It does appear, from the above information, that the position is unlikely to alter without additional income streams. This position is backed up by officer investigations into how other country parks operate (see section below), which leads officers to conclude that this does appear to be a realistic position.
- 2.27 Officers draw Members’ attention to the fact that these figures have not been independently assessed (as the applicant is not making an enabling case). The figures were submitted to provide background information regarding the prospect of the Country Park being closed should alternative means of income not be sourced. However, as they have not been independently assessed, Officers do not rely upon these figures.
- 2.28 The owners of the Country Park currently have no legal obligation to keep the park open (nor to do so at nil cost to the visitor). Through this application, the applicant has offered to enter into a legal agreement requiring that the Country Park would remain open for public access in perpetuity and at nil cost to the users of the Country Park upon the operation of the wave pool scheme and whilst it remains operational). Given the high significance placed on the value of the Country Park as a public destination, officers give this significant weight.
- 2.29 This proposal is considered to safeguard the future of the Country Park. This is not to say that it would be the only way of safeguarding its future – it is nevertheless the one presented by the applicant and is convincing in respect of contributing to securing the financial viability of the Country Park overall.
- 2.30 The obligation offered by the applicant, to ensure the Country Park remains open to the public at nil cost, is considered in relation to Regulation 122(2) of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended):
- given the reasons of the Planning Committee’s resolution to refuse the previous hotel application (reference 22/01152) on the Country Park referred to the loss of public open space (considered to provide great amenity, as reflected in it being designated an Asset of Community Value), the obligation to safeguard

public access to the Country Park (of its area beyond the Site) is considered by officers necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;

- that the obligation would be triggered by occupation of the development would ensure it is directly related to the development;
- the area of the Country Park that would be covered by the obligation would have a relationship with the development, with the two sharing facilities / infrastructure including car parking, such that the spatial extent of the obligation is considered fairly and reasonably related to the development.

2.31 As such, in combination with the significant economic benefits of the proposal, the safeguarding assurances of the County Park is given significant weight in support of the proposal.

Other Country Parks

2.32 In order to gauge the challenges and financial context of running country parks to provide some level of marker or comparison, Officers have undertaken research and have looked into how two other private country parks are operated – River Dart Country Park in Devon (90 acres) and Aldenham Country Park in Hertfordshire (100 acres). Both are significantly smaller than Betteshanger Country Park which has an area of about 210 acres.

2.33 River Dart currently operates at weekends only (due to winter season) and charges an entry fee for all visitors over the age of three. This is currently set at £3 per person (winter rate), but the summer rate is £13.20 per person (aged over 5), a rate of £7.15 per person for three and four year olds and a rate of £5.50 per dog. There are additional charges for activities at the park, including overnight camping.

2.34 Aldenham Country Park is a not-for-profit farming, food, rural care and education enterprise. Entrance to Aldenham Country Park is free, but there is a £4.50/ £5.00 charge for car parking, £3 per person charge for the children's playground and other charges for visiting the farm and animal petting area. The park offers paid for camping facilities too.

2.35 Officers have also held discussions with three other Councils involved in the running of publicly owned country parks – Kent County Council, Hastings Borough Council and Essex County Council. From these discussions it was apparent that one of the benefits publicly run parks have over privately owned parks is that staffing and costs can be shared across sites to reduce outgoings.

2.36 Despite the ability to share costs across sites, Kent County Council nevertheless still confirmed that it operates an 80/20 model across its parks – referring to its Kent Country Parks Strategy 2023-2028, where an objective looks to “*maximise the opportunities to generate income on the sites through catering, education, events and innovative paid for facilities and services whilst operating at maximum efficiency*”. The Strategy goes on to explain that “*The Kent Country Parks service is already generating income to cover approximately 76% of its running costs....Over the next five years the service will review the efficiency of these income generating services and seek to maximise the income and profitability of the services offered. Alongside this we will look for opportunities to expand our offer across the County Parks sites (where this is possible) either through existing income streams or by adopting new and innovative services or facilities.*”

- 2.37 This research makes it clear that whether a park is privately owned, run as a not-for-profit enterprise or as a publicly run park, ensuring a park is financially self-sustaining is a significant challenge due to the operating costs involved.

Principle of Hotel Development in this Location

- 2.38 The Site is located outside the existing settlement confines, within the countryside defined by Core Strategy paragraph 1.49 as “*undeveloped land beyond settlement boundaries*”. In such a location, Core Strategy Policy DM1 (Settlement Boundaries) restricts development other than in specific and limited circumstances except where it is justified by other development plan policies, or functionally requires such a location, or is ancillary to existing development. As the proposed development does not fall within any of these exceptions, it is contrary to Policy DM1.
- 2.39 Whilst the principle of settlement boundaries of Policy DM1 is considered consistent with the aims of the Framework (including to accommodate development on previously developed land, to make better use of under-utilised land and buildings, and to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside), it is also identified that Policy DM1 was written at a time when lower levels of development and growth were required and so as such is considered to be out of date.
- 2.40 Core Strategy Policy DM15 seeks to resist development that would result in the loss of, or adversely affect the character or appearance of, the countryside. However, given that the spatial provisions of Policy DM1 are afforded less weight, it follows that the blanket restriction part of Policy DM15 to prevent development resulting in the loss of countryside (which the proposed hotel development would be contrary to) is not up-to-date and must also not carry full weight.
- 2.41 The draft Local Plan includes Policy E4 (Tourism Accommodation and Attractions) which relates to hotel development. The policy is supportive of such development where it is within or adjoining designated settlement confines (as a spatial limitation). In respect of the location of the Site outside and not adjoining an existing settlement, there is conflict with that part of draft Local Plan Policy E4 as currently drafted.
- 2.42 However, as there remain unresolved objections to draft Policy E4 relating to concerns that its spatial limitation for hotel accommodation is too restrictive against the Framework as national policy⁴, less than full weight is afforded to the Policy E4.
- 2.43 Draft Local Plan Policy E4 also has qualitative / technical provisions relating to design and character / appearance of the surrounding area (including level / type of activity), landscape character and biodiversity, heritage, residential amenity, the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA and the accessibility of the site along with sustainable travel options, impacts of traffic generation, and car parking and access. These criteria of Policy E4, as relevant, are considered in sections of this report below.

Open Space

- 2.44 Betteshanger Country Park is designated as open space. The current and emerging development plan have several policies in respect of the loss of open space, which must be considered in assessing this part of the proposal.

⁴ Framework paragraph 88 c) supports sustainable tourism and leisure developments that respect the character of the countryside

- 2.45 Firstly, Core Strategy Policy DM25 seeks to resist the loss of open space unless there is an identified surplus; or the open space does not / could not contribute to addressing a deficiency; or an equivalent replacement area of open space is provided.
- 2.46 Draft Local Plan Policy PM5 also affords protection to open space if it is significant in relation to the character of a settlement or built-up area; provides for the setting of an important building or scheduled monument; or in itself is of historic or cultural value.
- 2.47 Core Strategy Policy DM25 and draft Local Plan Policies PM5 and E4 should be read alongside paragraph 103 of the Framework – that existing open space should not be built on unless it is shown to be surplus to requirements, the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision, or development is for an alternative recreational provision whose benefits would clearly outweigh the loss of the open space.
- 2.48 Regard is also had to the Council's 'Open Space Play and Standards Paper' (2019). This recognises the Country Park as semi/natural green space. For such semi/natural green space, the 'Open Space Play and Standards Paper' finds there to be a significant surplus within the district:
- “the existing provision of 3.47 hectares per 1,000 population is well above the national FIT [Fields in Trust] benchmark of 1.801 hectares per 1,000 population.”⁵*
- 2.49 In considering the quality of semi/natural green space across the district, the 'Open Space Play and Standards Paper' is again helpful. It presents that the Country Park, along with other such areas, exceeds the set threshold of quality, noting that just one site in the district (within the Dover area) is falling below that threshold.
- 2.50 The Council has undertaken an Open Space Assessment Report (December 2019) and Open Space and Sport Topic Paper (2022) as part of its evidence base for the draft Local Plan. The Open Space Assessment Report specifically refers to Betteshanger Country Park and identifies it as the largest natural and semi-natural greenspace site in the district, accounting for 24% of that provision. The report also identifies the Country Park as being the second highest scoring site in the district in terms of its quality, recognising its importance as an area of open space. The Topic Paper concludes that the Country Park should be retained as open space as, even though the amount of such green space exceeds the quantity standard, the wider and general benefits of open space are recognised.
- 2.51 The proposed hotel would result in the loss of 2.6ha (total Site area) of open space and the Site plays an important role in providing not only a local but also a regional area of open space.
- 2.52 The quality of the Site within the Country Park must be considered too. The proposed hotel is located immediately adjacent to the car park with less functional connection to the wider areas of open space. The Site also has had less public amenity over some years when it was used as construction storage / compound during the development of the visitor centre. Accordingly, despite the Country Park's noted importance within the Topic Paper, Officers consider development on the Site and its loss as open space would not be significant in the overall context and would not result in a significant loss that would affect the wider enjoyment of the open space on offer.

⁵ Paragraph 4.18, 'Open Space and Sport Topic Paper (including Local Green Space Assessment)' (September 2022)

- 2.53 Moreover, whilst Betteshanger Country Park is an important open space, the district does have a recognised surplus of semi/natural green space. As such, the proposed loss of open space is considered to comply with the tests of Core Strategy Policy DM25 and the Framework.
- 2.54 Given the extent of the surplus of semi/natural green space, this position of policy compliance would remain the case if the proposed wave pool scheme, which is being considered under a different planning application (reference 22/01158) on this agenda was to be granted planning permission and delivered as well.
- 2.55 In addition, contributing to the assessment is the fact that the scheme would, through a s.106 agreement, safeguard future public access to the open space, which in officers' view is very significant.
- 2.56 As such, on balance, whilst the importance of the wider open space with the Country Park is of significance, the proposal is considered to be compliant with the development plan and the aims of the Framework in respect of loss of open space and would safeguard future access to the open space.

Asset of Community Value

- 2.57 As an Asset of Community Value (ACV), the Council recognises that the Country Park has a role in furthering the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community. The application of ACV nomination refers to the Country Park's natural environment and availability for walking and cycling, enjoyed by all ages, to enable the local community to 'unwind, relax, enjoy nature, play, learn and socialise for free'.
- 2.58 Whilst the hotel scheme would result in the change of use and development of part of the Country Park, the area of development is small in relation to the greater expanse of the Country Park, closely related to the existing car park and buildings, and positioned on the edge of the Country Park adjacent to its northern boundary. Accordingly, it is considered by officers that the development would not significantly affect the wider use of the Country Park (within any limitations of future management measures) and would not significantly diminish the character or environmental quality of the Country Park to an extent that it could no longer be enjoyed for wellbeing and social interests. As such, the proposed development is considered by officers to be compatible with the Country Park's status as an ACV.

Local Green Space

- 2.59 Representations to the draft Local Plan and this planning application state that the Country Park should be designated as Local Green Space. The Framework sets out the ability to designate land as Local Green Space, through local and neighbourhood plans. The Site is not currently in the Local Plan, nor proposed in the draft Local Plan to be designated as Local Green Space.

Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

- 2.60 The proposed hotel is defined by the Framework as a main town centre use. Given the location of the Site, a sequential test (under Framework paragraph 91 and draft Local Plan Policy R2) is required as to whether or not the development could be located in a

town centre or, if not there, then in an edge of centre location (within 300m of the town centre boundary) before other sites can be considered.

- 2.61 The applicant has provided a town centre sequential test, which considers the availability and suitability of alternative sites of at least one hectare (identified through the Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment) for hotel development within the defined town centres of Dover, Deal and Sandwich or on the edge of those centres based on relevant wards. The applicant's methodology of identifying those sites that have been put forward for development (which includes wider economic functions as there is not a specific hotel/tourist use call for sites) is considered appropriate.
- 2.62 A range of sites that have been identified as available for development through the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment were considered within the sequential test. Of the available sites (those not allocated for housing or that do not have planning permission, which would make them less likely to be available for a hotel use), a range of specific issues are identified by the applicant. These include constraints of poor access, flood risk (coastal, fluvial and/or surface water), heritage, landscape (including on the Kent Downs AONB), loss of sports facilities, loss of employment and/or local wildlife site designation; conflict with up-to-date neighbourhood plans; that the site is no longer available; and/or the site is beyond an edge of centre location. It is concluded that none of these sites, with officers agreeing with the applicant's assessment, represent an available, suitable and sequentially preferable alternative.
- 2.63 For the employment sites identified, other specific issues are raised by the applicant, include that they are substantially beyond the town centre boundary; the surrounding industrial environment is not suited to a higher end hotel scheme; they provide important employment and economic development; they have extant planning permission or are allocated for other development; they are already being promoted for other uses; that development would be out of keeping with the built character of surrounding areas; they are in areas of higher flood risk; and/or they are constrained by heritage designations.
- 2.64 Based on the sequential test work carried out by the applicant, it is reasonable to conclude that no site within the limited confines of the district's town centres or with an edge of centre location is appropriately available or suitable for the proposed development subject of this application.
- 2.65 Paragraph 94 of the Framework requires that for 'retail and leisure development' greater than 2,500m² of gross floorspace and located outside of a town centre consideration of its impact on town centre investment and vitality / viability be carried out. The Framework provides guidance on what constitutes 'retail and leisure development' in its definition of 'main town centre uses': of importance is that the Framework identifies hotels as 'tourism development' that is distinct from 'retail development' or 'leisure development'. Therefore, there is no national policy requirement to assess the town centre impact of tourism uses including hotels.
- 2.66 Draft Local Plan Policy R2 is in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF.
- 2.67 As such, the proposal is considered to meet the requirements of the development plan and the Framework in respect of town centre uses following the application of the sequential test.

Transport and Highways

Accessibility

- 2.68 Core Strategy Policy DM11 (Location of Development and Managing Travel Demand) seeks to restrict travel generating development to existing urban areas and rural settlement confines unless otherwise justified by development plan policies. In this regard the proposed development, being outside the settlement boundary, is considered to conflict with Policy DM11.
- 2.69 However, whilst the aim of Policy DM11 and the Framework are similar – to maximise use of sustainable modes of transport – the blanket restriction of Policy DM11 (to prevent development outside of settlement boundaries) does not follow the approach of the Framework, which instead seeks to actively manage patterns of growth to support sustainable modes of transport (considering the location of development on its specific merits). Therefore, Policy DM11 in the context of the proposed development should be afforded less than full weight.
- 2.70 Draft Local Plan Policy TI1 and the Framework seek (i) to locate travel generating development where there is opportunity for walking, cycling and use of public transport and (ii) for development to be designed to maximise such opportunities for sustainable travel. Specific to hotel development, draft Local Plan Policy E4 requires consideration to the accessibility of the site along with sustainable travel options, impacts of traffic generation, and car parking and access.
- 2.71 The applicant's Transport Assessment identifies the site to be within a 5km cycling distance of much of Deal / Sholden, with a direct, shared cycleway / footway along A258 Sandwich Road to the Country Park. There is also pedestrian access to the Site along the same A258 footway route but recognising that walking distances from much of Deal / Sholden are further than would commonly be travelled by foot.
- 2.72 The consultation response from Active Travel England refers the Council to its standing advice – that the government's aim is for walking, wheeling and cycling to be the most convenient, desirable and affordable way to travel. This advice has been considered. This highlights that the hotel development has had regard to pedestrian accessibility within the Site; has a controlled approach to car parking; provides dedicated space for cycle parking; has staff changing / showering facilities; would be appropriately lit for users; is within an appropriate cycling distance of Sholden / Deal and would have sustainable travel plan to maximised non car modes of travel. The development is considered to have had regard to the aims and objectives of Active Travel England.
- 2.73 Bus travel to the site is achievable, with bus stops served by routes 80/80A and 81/81B within a 15 minute walking distance on the A258 and Burgess Green / Broad Lane. New bus stop infrastructure will be provided on the Betteshanger Road / Sandwich Road roundabout, at the entrance to the Country Park, through the delivery of the housing scheme (20/00419) on the former colliery pithead site.
- 2.74 Sustainable transport, consistent with the Framework's definition of such, would also be provided to the Site through electric vehicles, encouraged through on-site charging infrastructure (to be secured through condition) and national government initiatives to phase out combustion engine vehicles.
- 2.75 Given the scale of development, transport initiatives to improve / maximise sustainable travel to the Site have been explored further. The applicant has submitted a travel plan that highlights a number of broad measures including travel information packs and a commitment to encourage car sharing. Beyond this however, a more tangible measure

of the hotel operator facilitating minibus travel to staff between the Site and nearby towns / villages is considered necessary. The applicant is agreeable to such minibus provision, which can be secured via obligations of the s.106 undertaking.

- 2.76 With these improved measures, the Site's location is considered suitably accessible by sustainable means of transport, compliant with draft Local Plan Policies TI1 and E4 and relevant policies of the Framework.

Impact on the Road Network

- 2.77 Consultation advice from the Local Highways Authority (LHA), as previously received, has identified junctions on the highway network for which the impacts of the development (including any trips from associated restaurant and gym facilities), alongside that from cumulative committed schemes, should be assessed.
- 2.78 Following clarification from the applicant that the gym would be for hotel guests only and additional trips associated with the restaurant have been factored into the transport modelling, the LHA has advised that on the most sensitive junction of London Road / Mongeham Road and London Road / Manor Road on the western edge of Deal / Sholden, the trips from development would not be so significant as to represent a severe impact on the local highway network. This has regard to the majority of the trips associated with this development being outside of peak hours.
- 2.79 An impact from the development on the Northbourne Road / A256 junction is identified by the LHA, but able to be mitigated through minor improvements works to be undertaken by applicant under a s.278 agreement.
- 2.80 National Highways has confirmed the hotel development would not have an unacceptable impact on the safety, reliability and/or operational efficiency of the strategic road network.
- 2.81 The proposal would also provide a proportionate financial contribution towards the improvement scheme at A2 Whitfield Roundabout.

Car Parking and Servicing

- 2.82 The amount of car parking for the hotel development in combination with that for the wave pool scheme and continuing attraction of the Country Park has been presented by the applicant. The proposed approach is:
- 97 space designated car park for the hotel (87 bays for guests and 10 spaces for staff);
 - a designated hotel pick up / drop off area; and
 - overflow hotel use (for guests and staff) of a 770 space consolidated car park for the Country Park and proposed wave pool scheme as/when the hotel car park is full.
- 2.83 The applicant has based the proposed level of car parking on an accumulation study that indicates a peak parking demand of circa 412 vehicles on a weekend afternoon (excluding Country Park special event days), which represents maximum parking stress of 48%.
- 2.84 For special event days at the Country Park, the applicant's assessment considers that parking demand would be slightly greater (at 113%) than supply, requiring some form of overflow parking, as is already the situation. This approach is considered more

efficient than to set aside greater space for car parking that is only required for occasional peak event days.

- 2.85 The LHA has reviewed the proposed parking arrangements and considers them appropriate and acceptable to meet the car parking needs of the development alongside the Country Park and the separately proposed wave pool scheme.

Design

- 2.86 The Framework emphasises that creating high quality places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. This includes that development should function well and add to the overall quality of the area; is visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and effective landscaping; is sympathetic to the local character; establishes a strong sense of place; and is safe, inclusive and accessible, promoting health and wellbeing, with a high standard of amenity for future users.
- 2.87 Draft Local Plan Policy PM1 requires development to demonstrate an understanding and awareness of its context; give attention to the scale and materiality of buildings, in respect of the locality and neighbouring buildings; respect or create distinctive local character; and have a positive, coherent identity that is visually attractive. Draft Local Plan Policy E4 reinforces these design criteria.
- 2.88 The proposed hotel building would relate closely to the existing visitor centre and would be seen together in views from the entrance / arrival space to the Country Park and elsewhere. The form and linear proportions of the visitor centre building has influenced that of the proposed hotel – the hotel building would have a tight gable form without overhanging eaves, matching the silhouette of the visitor centre in this way.
- 2.89 The vertical wood cladding above ground floor level and standing seam grey metal roof of the hotel building would match that of the visitor centre, which together would help provide a positive identity and legible sense of place.
- 2.90 Whilst the scale of the hotel building, in respect of its four-storey height (with 15m tall gables) and 53.4m width (across the front elevation) is much greater than that of the visitor centre, there is sufficient space between the two for the hotel to not visually dominate or detract from the setting of the smaller structure.
- 2.91 The scale and form of the hotel building would provide a strong gateway feature to the entrance into the Country Park and arrival space around the existing car park. Whilst that visual relationship is considered positive in creating a distinctive character, it nonetheless is sensitive as are other views of the hotel building from the Country Park and wider landscape. For this reason, the quality of architectural details and materials of the hotel building as proposed (referenced above) is of great importance, with substantial weight placed upon them in considering the merits of the development.
- 2.92 Conditions to secure the high-quality materials and other important design details of the building, to be able to resist any pressure for the concept and quality of the development to be weakened through cost saving / value engineering, are recommended.
- 2.93 With regard to the level of activity of the proposed hotel in relation to the character of the surrounding area (with reference to draft Local Plan Policy E4), this is considered by officers to be compatible. The hotel would reinforce the existing visitor

facilities/attractions in the north-western part of the Country Park, as a location for local communities and wider visitors to enjoy for leisure and recreation purposes.

- 2.94 The Kent Police Designing Out Crime Officer has no objection to the proposed development subject to a condition which should include details of boundary treatment; car parking and vehicle management; lighting; door and window specification; cycle and bin store controls; CCTV and security during construction.
- 2.95 Draft Local Plan Policy SP2 seeks for development to be accessible and inclusive without barriers to access. The applicant has confirmed that 5% of the hotel rooms would be specified to be wheelchair accessible (a percentage consistent with what would be required for new dwellings), which would be secured via condition; that all other rooms would be adaptable for wheelchairs (should the demand for wheelchair accessible accommodation exceed 5% of rooms); and that other parts of the hotel – communal spaces, lifts and corridors would be wheelchair accessible.
- 2.96 Draft Local Plan Policy CC1, consistent with the objectives of Policy SP1, requires that all new non-residential buildings achieve a BREEAM rating of 'very good', including 'very good' in the 'energy efficiency' component of that assessment. This standard of sustainable design and construction would be secured by a condition of the planning permission as recommended. The promotion of sustainable construction would also be secured by condition in requiring a construction waste reduction, management and recycling plan to be submitted to and approved by the planning authority, in accordance with draft Local Plan Policy CC2.
- 2.97 Overall, the design approach of the hotel development is considered to be high quality, appropriate for the sensitive location and consistent with the Framework and draft Local Plan, in accordance with Policy PM1 and relevant criteria of Policy E4.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 2.98 Core Strategy Policy DM16 (Landscape Character) seeks to protect the qualities of the district's landscape. Harm to the landscape would only be acceptable if development has been allocated through the plan-led system and designed to include appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures; or otherwise the landscape impacts of development can be sufficiently avoided or reduced. Core Strategy Policy DM15 seeks to protect the character and appearance of the countryside.
- 2.99 Draft Local Plan Policy NE2 (Landscape Character and the Kent Downs AONB) requires proposals to have particular regard to the wider landscape character of its site as identified by the Council's Landscape Character Assessment 2020.
- 2.100 Under draft Local Plan Policy E4, regard should be had (amongst other matters) to the extent that hotel development would conserve and enhance the character of the surrounding landscape, and whether or not it would result in an unacceptable intrusion into the open countryside.
- 2.101 These current and draft policies are considered consistent with the Framework, which requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural environment by recognising the intrinsic character of the countryside (paragraph 174), and to be sympathetic to local character and landscape setting (paragraph 130).
- 2.102 The Planning Committee resolved in considering the previous application that the hotel development would harm the character and appearance of the Country Park. This is a consideration in the determination of this application.

- 2.103 With reference to the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment, it is noted that there would be the loss of a number of groups of trees and sections of poor-quality scrub. These are assessed as being Category C by virtue of their low arboricultural quality, except for a row of Leyland Cypress trees assessed as being Category B. No veteran trees, Category A trees or trees afforded protection from a Tree Preservation Order would be removed. To compensate for this loss, new tree and landscape planting is proposed across the Site, surrounding the hotel building and amongst the car parking spaces, which would be appropriate native species as secured by condition.
- 2.104 Regard is had to draft Local Plan Policy CC8 that seeks the planting of one new tree for every 500 sqm of new commercial floorspace. Measuring approximately 10,500 sqm, the hotel development to be consistent with the policy should provide at least 21 new trees. The applicant has confirmed that this would be achieved as part of habitat improvement works on land adjacent to the east of the Country Park and at a location known as Hammill Field, located between Woodnesborough and Staple, being progressed for ecological reasons. In the circumstances of the application, this is considered a reasonable approach, despite being off-site, and can be secured via s.106 agreement.
- 2.105 The applicant has submitted a LVIA that considers the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development.

Landscape Effects

- 2.106 The applicant's LVIA in landscape terms considers development at a Site level would have a moderate adverse impact at year one, which would be reduced to minor adverse by year 15 once planting across the site has established itself. This takes account of embedded mitigation including the retained tree line along the northern edge of the Country Park, and the design merits of the building (through its form and materials) to establish a sense of place with the existing visitor centre.
- 2.107 However, given the size of the building, it is uncertain how much the maturing planting would reduce its Site level landscape effect – thus a moderate adverse effect in the longer term is considered more likely.
- 2.108 For other landscape receptors including Lydden Valley Landscape Character Area and local landscape character areas of the Country Park and South Lydden Valley (as defined by the applicant), the LVIA identifies no more than a minor adverse impact, which would reduce over time as landscape planting would mature. With doubt over the moderating extent of the landscaping (as for the Site level assessment), a longer term minor adverse effect is considered more likely to endure.

Visual Effects

- 2.109 The LVIA identifies viewpoints from within the Country Park and the surrounding wider area (including from the A258, a number of public footpaths, nearest residential properties and golf courses) where the hotel development would be seen.
- 2.110 The LVIA considers that the greatest visual effects would be moderate adverse at year one from the Country Park and from public footpath 0300/EE233/12 to the north of the Site. By year 15, the LVIA presents that these moderate adverse effects would be reduced to minor – but as with consideration of the landscape effects, it is more likely that moderate visual effects would endure.

- 2.111 The hotel building and Site would have external lighting, which would be subject to a detailed lighting scheme (to be secured by condition) to ensure illuminance is tightly focussed on where it is needed and levels are no more than essential for the function of the scheme.

Cumulative Effects

- 2.112 Given the hotel development is proposed alongside the wave pool scheme (application 22/01158), the LVIA has carried out a cumulative assessment of the two together. It notes that the perception of the two schemes would be different due to their respective siting, such that they would only be perceived together from locations within the Country Park and to the north from southern parts of the Lydden Valley. Thus the LVIA considers the cumulative landscape effects are limited, generally reflecting those of each scheme individually. Therefore, when taken together, no more than a moderate adverse effect from Northbourne Landscape Character Area, the Country Park and agricultural land to west are expected.
- 2.113 The cumulative visual impacts of both developments are greater, with major adverse effects where they are seen together from within the Country Park. Beyond the Country Park, cumulative visual effects are considered by the LVIA no more than moderate adverse in viewpoints from the A258, nearest residential properties and the wider network of public footpaths.

Overall

- 2.114 With the adverse landscape and visual effects identified, the development is considered contrary to Core Strategy Policy DM16, the aims of Policy DM15 in protecting the character / quality of the countryside and draft Local Plan Policies E4 and NE2. This matter is considered further in the planning balance at the end of this report.

Public Rights of Way

- 2.115 KCC Public Rights of Way (PROW) and Access Service has confirmed the development would have no direct impact on the PROW network. However, it does identify that the hotel would increase usage of a number of public bridleways (EE495, EE232, EE233, EE235 and ED4) and therefore seeks a financial contribution of £100,000 for improvement works (including surface repairs, signage and management of overgrowing vegetation) to be carried out.

Ecology

- 2.116 Biodiversity refers to all species of plants and animals, including species that are protected through legal provisions as well as habitats that support important assemblages of species, whether for diversity or rarity. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all public authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity, which is a material consideration in the determination of this application.
- 2.117 Biodiversity refers to all species of plants and animals, including species that are protected through legal provisions as well as habitats that support important assemblages of species, whether for diversity or rarity. Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all public authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity, which is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

- 2.118 For species also afforded legal protection there may be an additional need for a developer to seek a licence. At planning stage regard should be had as to whether or not it is likely that a protected species licence will be granted, whilst recognising that the level / extent of information that would be required in respect of the licensing process (with Natural England / Defra being the competent authority) is greater than would normally be expected at planning stage.
- 2.119 The Framework at paragraph 186a sets out how matters of habitat and biodiversity should be considered when determining a planning application and it states that where 'significant' harm to biodiversity from development cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated or compensated (as a last resort) planning permission should be refused.
- 2.120 Draft Local Plan Policy SP13, in presenting a mitigation hierarchy for development affecting habitats and biodiversity, is generally consistent with the Framework in this regard. Whilst Policy SP13 includes a balancing provision for any residual adverse effects (which cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated for) to be balanced against benefits of development, this part of the policy is afforded little weight given that there are outstanding objections to it.
- 2.121 The Framework at paragraph 180 seeks for development to provide a net gain in biodiversity, without setting any specific level. Draft Local Plan Policy SP13 and Policy NE1 require development to provide an overall biodiversity net gain of at least 10%. Provisions in the Environment Act 2021 to require a minimum 10% net gain are now effective, but do not apply to this application as it was submitted before 12th February 2024. Although over 10% biodiversity net gain is being offered by the applicant, it is not a statutory requirement for this application, although limited weight is still attached to that same provision by policies in the draft Local Plan.
- 2.122 The planning application and the ecological impacts of the proposed development have been considered by the Council's Senior Natural Environment Officer (SNEO), with comments set out in the consultation section of this report above.
- 2.123 For the proposed development, extensive representations received have raised a wide range of ecology matters. The main ecological considerations for this application are presented via the following sections below:
- i. Habitat Mitigation and Compensation;
 - ii. Turtle Doves and Management of Recreational Activity
 - iii. Fiery Clearwing Moth
 - iv. Other Invertebrates
 - v. Fungi
 - vi. Lighting
 - vii. Other Matters
 - viii. Appropriate Assessment
- 2.124 Various reports and information have been submitted by the applicant, which include:
- Update Ecological Appraisal (September 2023)
 - Document to Inform a Habitat Regulations Assessment (January 2023)
 - Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy (October 2023)
 - Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi (October 2023)
 - Biodiversity Net Gain Metric (August 2023)
 - Consideration of DDC SNEO Response (November 2023)
 - Summary of Key Issues (December 2023)
 - Fiery Clearwing Mitigation (January 2024)

- Turtle Dove Mitigation Cost (January 2024)
- Habitat Mitigation and Compensation

- 2.125 The development would result in the loss of reedbeds as priority habitat - amounting to 200m², some 7% of the total reedbed habitat area within the Site.
- 2.126 At a Site-specific level, this revised application, compared to the scheme proposed under 22/01152, has reduced the footprint of the lower ground floor building and is now able to retain pond habitat that before would have been lost.
- 2.127 Against the mitigation hierarchy, considering first matters of avoidance, regard is had to the applicant's town centre and flood risk sequential tests, which identify there is no other reasonably available site that would meet the specific requirements of the hotel development. Within the Country Park itself, the location of the hotel is considered to be suitable, given the close relationship of the Site to the existing car park and other buildings.
- 2.128 As mitigation to the reedbed habitat loss, 390m² of on-Site and 570m² of off-site (adjacent to the east of the Site) reedbed habitat creation is proposed. The SNEO is satisfied that this is an appropriate level of compensatory habitat creation for the reedbed habitat loss.
- 2.129 The new off-site reedbed habitat creation will also contribute to securing off-site biodiversity net gain for the development. The off-site works (including the reedbed creation area and Hammill Field) would be secured as obligations of a s.106 agreement to any planning permission.
- 2.130 Matters relating to impacts of the development on trees are addressed in the landscape section of the assessment part of this report above.
- 2.131 The applicant has also proposed for the development to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain, this is proposed to be secured by planning obligation.
- 2.132 This consideration of avoidance and approach of mitigation and compensation regarding habitat loss is considered to result in a position of less than significant harm, which is consistent with Framework paragraph 186 a).

Turtle Doves and Management of Recreational Activity

- 2.133 The Planning Committee resolved to refuse the previous hotel application (22/01152), on the basis including for reason that "The measures proposed in connection with the hotel development are not considered adequate, with significant uncertainties to ensure there would not be significant harm to that turtle dove population and objectives of mitigation". The impact on turtle doves has been further considered by the applicant and the proposal now includes additional measures to:
- enhance land adjacent to the east of the Country Park, so to be suitable for turtle dove habitat, from the outset / commencement of development (as opposed to only if it was necessary following a regime of monitoring); and
 - restrict access to a larger area of Country Park (25 ha compared to 15 ha).
- 2.134 The Country Park provides habitat for turtle doves, which is the UK's fastest declining bird species and is at risk of extinction, such that it features on the 'UK Red List of Conservation Concern' and the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red

List of Threatened Species'. The turtle dove is also listed in the Natural Environmental and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended) as a species of principal importance.

2.135 As well as supporting its own population of turtle doves, the Country Park also is intended to provide compensation for the loss of turtle dove habitat from the residential development (planning permission 20/00419) of the Betteshanger former colliery pithead site to the west, as set out in the s.106 of 20/00419. For background, the approved Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy for 20/00419 has the following objectives:

- to provide new habitat opportunities for turtle doves to allow an expansion of the existing population associated with the Country Park;
- to implement management to ensure habitat areas remain suitable for turtle doves;
- to secure the long-term future of the turtle dove population through ongoing management and monitoring; and
- to manage public access to maintain areas as suitable for turtle doves.

2.136 The new habitat opportunities (as per 20/00419) include new open mosaic habitat, enhancement of open mosaic habitat, pond creation and scrub establishment and supplementary feeding site within approximately 50m of the Site as detailed in the Biodiversity Offsetting Scheme. These habitat creation works were implemented in 2022. The effectiveness of these habitat creation works is being monitored, with the aim to see an expansion of the turtle dove population.

2.137 The proposed hotel development would not impact upon optimal turtle dove foraging habitat, but is located within approximately 150 metres of known breeding territories and within approximately 50 metres of a supplementary feeding site relating to the mitigation for planning application 20/00419. The key area of consideration is therefore the impact created through disturbance from the use of the hotel itself and through more general increase in visitor numbers to the Country Park. The application details that the hotel will accommodate some 117,384 guests per year. The additional visitors that the proposed wave pool scheme (planning application 22/01158) would generate (if granted planning permission and delivered) is estimated to be some 203,000 people. The two schemes combined would amount to some 320,000 visitors.

2.138 In response to the projected increase in visitor numbers and the sensitivity of the Country Park to turtle doves, the applicant has provided an 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy'. The 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy' considers the nature of the visitor activity:

- a proportion of visits are likely to only visit the hotel or wave pool development; where some visitors would make use of existing Country Park amenities, much of that activity would be focussed around the visitor centre and play park, or would involve shorter walks within the nearby vicinity of these facilities;
- a proportion of total visitors are likely to undertake longer walks within the wider area of the Country Park;
- the bulk of visitors would be between 10.00 and 18.00, with the Country Park remaining relatively quiet outside those periods;
- overnight guests are unlikely to roam the Country Park at night given it is unlit; and
- overnight guests would be prohibited from bringing dogs.

2.139 For the proportion of visitors that would make use of the wider Country Park, the potential impacts identified by the 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove

Strategy' are disturbance to turtle doves; trampling and erosion of areas of botanical and invertebrate interest; and disturbance to other wildlife species.

2.140 The 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy' proposes measures to manage additional visitors and enhance areas of turtle dove habitat:

- the Country Park would be zoned between: 'core visitor area', encompassing main facilities and activity areas; areas of 'informal access', to provide for walking and cycling on designated routes; and
- areas of 'restricted access', including existing turtle dove nesting habitat and supplementary feeding areas, where there would be no public access. This area has increased from 15 ha in the previous application to 25 ha, incorporating features of highest sensitivity within the Country Park including turtle dove nesting habitat and supplementary feeding areas;
- establishment of a designated warden or wildlife officer to help implement the approach to visitor management;
- the creation of an additional turtle dove feeding site and new pond in an area of restricted access in the eastern part of the Country Park to offset the potential impact of increased disturbance on the feeding site within 50m of the proposed development; and
- establishment of a new area of land, adjoining to the east of the Country Park, for provision of additional turtle dove measures. The applicant is committed to carrying out these improvement measures from the commencement of development (where its commitment before under application reference 22/01152 was only to seek to utilise that land should it be necessary following a regime of monitoring). This land currently comprises open grassland in use for grazing but would be managed to strengthen hedgerows and scrub planting to promote new breeding habitat, to create two ponds, and establish suitable foraging habitat.

2.141 A plan from the 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy', showing the areas of proposed visitor management for the Country Park (of the 'core visitor area', 'informal access area' and 'restricted access area') is at Figure 8.

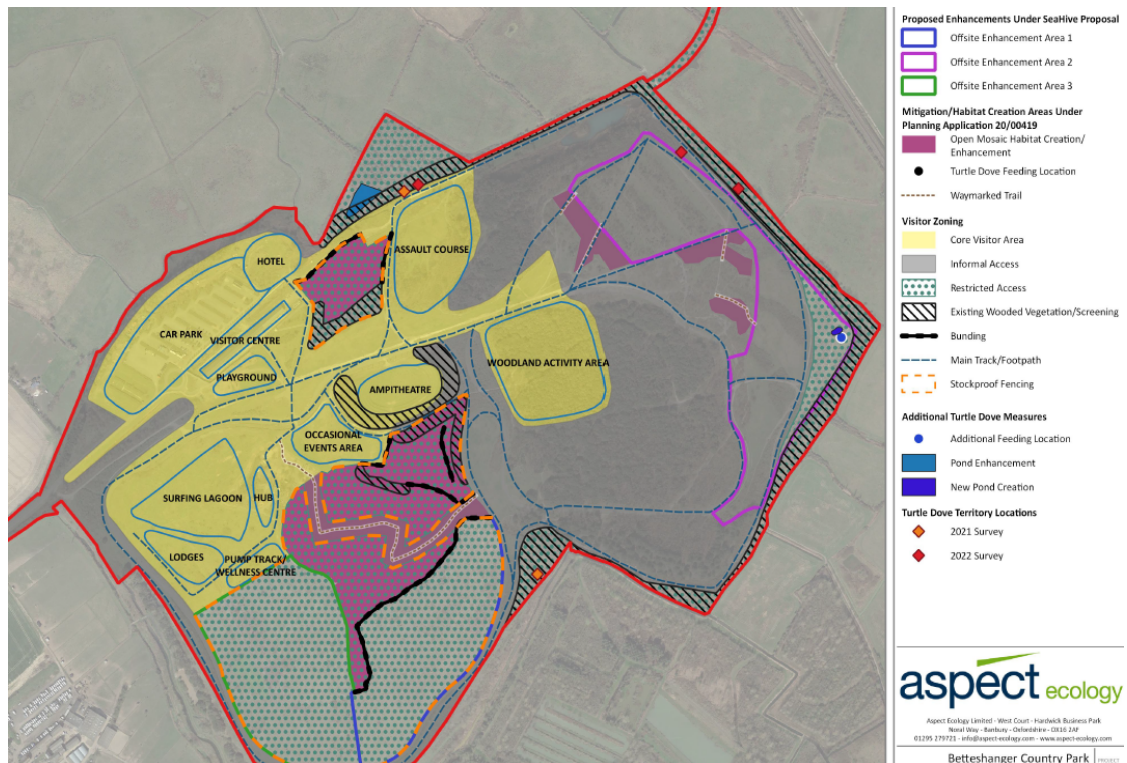


Figure 8: Proposed Zonal Areas of Country Park

- 2.142 The applicant has also agreed to prohibit the hire and use of small electric vehicles for leisure purposes by visitors to the Country Park, which provide a source of general disturbance.
- 2.143 The applicant puts forward that the off-site habitat creation measures at Hammill Field and adjacent to the east of the Country Park can form a key area of turtle dove habitat, suitable for the local population. These enhancements are not intended to replace mitigation measures within the Country Park, but instead are offered as an additional enhancement or reassurance to complement the overall package of measures closer to the Site.
- 2.144 The applicant's position is that, together, these measures should provide an effective mitigation strategy, allowing for expansion of the turtle dove population.
- 2.145 The SNEO has advised of concerns that the applicant's approach to mitigation, as provided in the 'Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy' may not do enough to safeguard or enhance the turtle dove population of the Country Park, with regard to the measures in respect of planning permission 20/00419 and the proposed development now being considered.
- 2.146 Kent Wildlife Trust and RSPB, amongst others, raise concerns that development would undermine the turtle dove measures secured under planning permission 20/00419 and that cumulative visitor numbers would be very challenging to mitigate in a way that would not be damaging to turtle doves.
- 2.147 The SNEO does, however, acknowledge that the adaptive management approach proposed by the applicant means that, in principle at least, there will always be further actions that could be taken to reach a point of successful compensation.
- 2.148 To seek to address these concerns and uncertainties, the 'Outline Visitor Management

and Turtle Dove Strategy' proposes measures as adaptive mitigation (mitigation that can be adapted as time goes on to ensure it remains appropriate), should they be necessary, following an initial five-year monitoring period, of:

- i. alterations to the zoning areas, additional fencing, seasonal path closures and/or additional wardening;
- ii. establishment of additional feeding sites or extending committed feeding beyond five year; and
- iii. to seek alternative offsite measures through contributions to the RSPB's Operation Turtle Dove or agreements with local landowners.

2.149 In planning terms, points i. and ii. above can reasonably be relied upon and secured via s.106 agreement. Such an adaptive approach to mitigation based on monitoring and management, with scope for enabling specific measures to be introduced at the later date is considered to be reasonable. For point iii., whilst this is further clarified by the applicant in the submitted 'Indicative Costings for Offsite Turtle Dove Mitigation', it is still considered less defined.

2.150 The ability to make future changes to the spatial and zonal management of the Country Park, as well as to the turtle dove feeding regime, through the proposed adaptive approach to mitigation (which would be informed through future survey work and can be secured via legally enforceable obligations) is recognised; and it is considered that these measures are capable of improving the ongoing management of the Country Park to promote its habitat as favourable to turtle doves.

2.151 It is worth highlighting that the adaptive mitigation approach is not intended by the applicant to supersede or override the 'Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy' approved under application 20/00419; instead, they are intended to work alongside each other; to be informed through monitoring and responsive measures.

2.152 Whilst Officers recognise and understand the concerns and uncertainties highlighted, with sufficient safeguards through a S106 agreement to ensure that the adaptive mitigation can be effectively relied upon and successfully mitigate the identified harm to the species through both the 20/00419 scheme and the current application, it is considered that significant harm to turtle doves will be avoided.

Fiery Clearwing Moth

2.153 The hotel scheme on the Site would result in the loss of dock plants that support eggs laid by fiery clearwing moths. Fiery Clearwing is listed as a priority species, important for conservation, under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 and is protected under Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This would require a licence to be issued by Natural England to allow the development to proceed, with three tests to be met – of there being an overriding public interest; that there is no satisfactory alternative; and not being detrimental to population survival.

2.154 The fiery clearwing population of the Country Park as a whole is assessed by the applicant to be of county importance, although the SNEO considers its importance may be greater.

2.155 With regards to the first test of the licensing regime of there being an overriding public interest, the proposal would result in significant social and economic benefits that are fully considered in this report above. As such, the proposal is considered to meet the first part of the licensing test.

- 2.156 With regards to the second test of the licensing regime of there being no satisfactory alternative, the justification for the hotel development and its location both on this Site and within the Site as set out in the assessment section above concludes that the development could not reasonably be located elsewhere, following consideration of the applicant's town centre and flood risk spatial sequential tests, which identify that there is no other reasonably available site that would meet the specific needs of the proposal. Within the Country Park itself, the location of the development is considered by Officers to be suitable, given the close relationship of the Site to the built form on site. As such, the proposal is considered to sufficiently comply with both the second licensing test and the mitigation hierarchy consideration of 'avoidance' in paragraph 186a of the Framework.
- 2.157 The applicant's 'Assessment of Scarce Moth Species' presents an approach to mitigation of translocating the dock plants on which the eggs are located to an area within the Country Park adjacent to the south of the Site, separate to other areas of habitat improvement or offsetting areas. The translocation area would be designated as 'informal access' under the visitor management strategy and access to this part of the site would be discouraged through knee rail fencing and signage.
- 2.158 The applicant's 'Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi' presents an approach to mitigation of translocating the dock plants on which the eggs are located to an area within the Country Park to the south of the Site, separate to other areas of habitat improvement or offsetting areas. The translocation area would be designated as 'informal access' under the visitor management strategy and access discouraged through knee rail fencing and signage. The applicant states that a detailed methodology for the translocation would be worked up to inform a licence application post planning permission, considering that suitable habitat for Fiery Clearwing can be re-established.
- 2.159 Natural England (in its letter of 20/09/23) considers successful translocation of dock plants would be "exceedingly difficult". Instead, advice from Natural England is that dock plants should be seeded in the translocation area and managed so they proliferate, then wait for Fiery Clearwing to colonise. Only then could existing dock plants on the Site be destroyed.
- 2.160 The applicant is agreeable to an approach of sowing of dock seed (in addition to translocation), recognising there is some risk that the seeded dock will fail or will not be colonised by Fiery Clearwing. Translocation of foodplants (and any larvae present) to the receptor area is also proposed alongside long-term management and monitoring.
- 2.161 Whilst like Natural England, the SNEO recognises these are not tried and tested methods, the SNEO's comments conclude that they appear to be ecologically coherent and in line with Natural England's suggestion and on that basis, considers it is possible a protected species license would be granted.
- 2.162 Therefore, in these circumstances, taking into account the views of Natural England, and the comments of the SNEO who considers the proposals to be ecologically coherent, Officers are satisfied that it is reasonably likely a protected species licence for fiery clearwings would be granted following the carrying out of the relevant research within the 7 year implementation period.
- 2.163 Officers consider that attaching a condition with a longer implementation of the scheme (up to seven years) will provide the necessary assurances to ensure that significant harm will not occur in accordance with Natural England's advice alongside progressing

the approach to developing effective Fiery Clearwing mitigation / compensation through s.106 obligations to require:

- dock plant seeding establishment and management measures to be submitted and approved for identified dock receptor area;
- dock translocation and management plan to be submitted and approved, as relating to the development site and dock receptor area; and
- monitoring of mitigation / compensation measures to be undertaken on dock receptor area against objective targets. If secured measures were to be failing objective targets, an alternative approach to mitigation / compensation to avoid significant harm to be provided.

2.164 As such, Officers consider that on this basis the proposal would meet the requirements of paragraph 186a of the Framework and not result in significant harm to this species.

Other Invertebrates (including Sussex Emerald)

2.165 The applicant has submitted an 'Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi' report, which includes a review of invertebrate habitat potential and scarce invertebrate species. This considers the Site with regard to two methodologies of the 'Key to Identify Habitat for Invertebrates' from the Farm Environment Plan Manual⁶ and the Invertebrate Habitat Potential approach⁷.

2.166 The applicant's ecologist considers that a more dedicated invertebrate survey is not necessary, as the loss of habitats at the proposed development is not likely to lead to a significant impact upon general invertebrates, in accordance with Framework paragraph 186 a). He further considers that the submitted report – the 'Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi' – has been prepared by an experienced invertebrate ecologist, with regard to specific guidance documents rather than just professional judgement.

2.167 Beyond the assessment of general habitat, the 'Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi' report addresses information presented by environmental groups in representations that some notable invertebrate species have been sighted, including four lined horsefly, bright wave moth and Sussex emerald moth (in addition to fiery clearwing moths addressed above). In this regard, the applicant identifies:

- that wetland breeding habitat of the four lined horsefly would be almost fully retained by the development, whilst new areas of wildflower grassland would maintain a resource for the fly, such that no significant habitat loss relevant to this species is anticipated;
- regarding bright wave moths, the Site does not form typical habitat for the species or provide its main food plant (smooth tare), such that the development would not result in any significant relevant habitat loss; and
- for Sussex emerald moth, which is afforded statutory protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the recent record of it within the Country Park is at its southern edge, approximately 800m from the Site, although a larger breeding population cannot be ruled out. Whilst the main foodplant of the moth, wild carrot, is present on the Site, it is limited and the Site does not provide typical conditions for the species. However, as a precautionary measure the applicant proposes a larval survey is undertaken in

the optimal months of May/June prior to development commencing – this could be secured by planning condition, which would also reflect that if the moth species is found that a licence from Natural England would be required. Such a licence, with its tests as presented above, would ensure there would not be significant harm to this species in accordance with planning policy requirements.

- 2.168 Comments from the SNEO are that the applicant's approach to considering these specific invertebrate species is appropriate, along with the ability for new landscaping to incorporate opportunities and features (including bee bricks and habitat piles) suitable for invertebrates, as well as suitable replacement / additional habitat. As such, significant harm to the general assemblage of invertebrates is not identified.
- 2.169 Comments from the SNEO in respect of Sussex Emerald moths recognise that just one moth was recorded on the Country Park during July 2023; and that there is provision where there are exceptional circumstances for survey work to be carried out after planning permission has been granted. In the circumstances of the development, given the late identification of the single individual some distance from the Site, the SNEO advises, as a matter of judgement, that exceptional circumstances do exist to secure the survey work by condition. Such conditions would comprise (i) a pre-commencement condition for detailed survey to be carried out and submitted / approved by the planning authority to an agreed methodology; then (ii) should there be a positive finding and mitigation / compensation measures to also be submitted and agreed. In addition any Sussex Emerald moths present would be subject to protection by the licensing regime. The applicant has put forward a framework for how any mitigation/ compensation would be approached should this species be found to be present on the site in their October 2023 Assessment of Sussex Emerald Moth TN15. This appears to be a reasonable approach that is similar to that taken for Fiery Clearwing and takes into consideration the need for a licence. On this basis, Officers consider that there is a coherent plan for ensuring significant harm to the species can be mitigated or compensated for and on that basis, there is sufficient likelihood of a licence being granted, if one is needed (which will only be known following the implementation of further more extensive surveys).

Fungi

- 2.170 The Update Ecological Appraisal considers that whilst the Site is likely to support a range of fungi species there is no evidence to suggest that it is likely to support a fungi assemblage of elevated importance above the component habitat types.
- 2.171 The 'Additional Review of Invertebrates and Fungi' report provides further commentary that the vast majority of species identified by local enthusiasts are relatively common. Although four are considered rare in the UK, none are priority species or have or 'red data list' status. Of the rare species, the applicant's ecologist presents that all are associated with woodland habitats and so are unlikely to occur within the more open habitats of the Site.
- 2.172 The applicant also refers to Site of Special Scientific Interest guidelines that identify habitat assemblages known to be important features of fungi. In this regard the applicant considers that (i) apart from reedbed which is largely located outside of the development area, such habitats are not present within the Site; and (ii) of the fungi records provided by local enthusiasts in respect of those listed under the SSSI guidance (as forming part of one of the important habitat assemblages), they are unlikely to be supported by the Site.

- 2.173 Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed development area does not support an elevated fungi interest and the hotel development is unlikely to have a significant ecological impact upon fungi. The SNEO agrees with this position.

Lighting

- 2.174 In respect of the previous application, the SNEO raised whether a suitable lighting strategy for the hotel would sufficiently mitigate any potential for significant harm in respect of the nearby wooded and wetland areas of habitat.
- 2.175 In this application, a 'preliminary lighting assessment' is again included, with the SNEO advising that a detailed lighting scheme and screening approach would need to be secured by condition.
- 2.176 With regard to measures of mitigation presented by the Update Ecological Appraisal, including screening features to reduce light spill, reducing luminaires to a minimum, utilising low level external luminaires, using LED luminaires (that avoid UV, metal halide and fluorescent elements) and ensuring lights are managed to only be used when actively needed, the SNEO is content that, with the implementation of details secured by condition, the residual impact of lighting on bats is unlikely to be significant.

Other Matters

- 2.177 The SNEO is satisfied that (with mitigation, informed by further survey effort, secured), there would not be any significant harm in relation to badgers, beavers, reptiles, nesting birds and amphibians.
- 2.178 In respect of other mammals (hedgehogs, brown hares, harvest mice), the SNEO considers potential impacts during construction can be addressed / mitigated via a biodiversity / environmental construction management plan to be secured by condition.
- 2.179 A water vole mitigation strategy, with translocation to be subject to a licence application to Natural England, can be secured by condition.
- 2.180 The submitted Update Ecological Appraisal identifies that roosting bats are not a constraint to development. Mitigation for foraging / commuting bats would be by way of a sensitive lighting scheme as addressed above.
- 2.181 It is noted, and confirmed by Natural England, that the hotel development would not directly affect the population within the Country Park.
- 2.182 Following advice from the SNEO, given the interrelationship of important and sensitive ecology across the Country Park as a whole, a park-wide ecological and biodiversity management plan to further coordinate the mitigation / compensation measures addressed above, as well as to seek additional enhancements, is required. This would be secured by planning obligation.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Regulation 63: Appropriate Assessment: Recreational Pressure

- 2.183 It is necessary to consider any likely significant effects of the proposed development in respect of disturbance of birds due to increased recreational activity on the Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA (as a designated European Site).
- 2.184 It is not possible to discount the potential for people living or staying within Dover district, when considered in-combination with all other housing development, to have a likely significant effect on the protected Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA.
- 2.185 Following consultation with Natural England, the identified pathway for such a likely significant effect is an increase in recreational activity which causes disturbance of the species which led to the designation of the site and the integrity of the site itself.
- 2.186 A Strategic Access Mitigation and Monitoring Strategy (SAMM) has been prepared by the Council in order to monitor potential impacts on the qualifying bird species for the SPA arising from development in the district and to provide appropriate mitigation through a range of management and engagement methods.
- 2.187 This mitigation comprises several elements, including the monitoring of residential visitor numbers and behaviour to the Sandwich Bay, provision of wardens and other mitigation (for example signage, leaflets and other education).
- 2.188 Having had regard to the proposed mitigation measures (to manage recreational activities from existing and new residents), it is considered that the proposed development would not have a likely significant adverse effect on the integrity of the protected Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA where it would make a contribution of £56,886 towards implementation of the SAMM. This is calculated with regard to the number of bedspaces / size of hotel rooms and presented tariff: (1-bed: 50 x £268) + (2-bed: 48 x £537) + (3-bed: 22 x £805).
- 2.189 The SNEO is satisfied with this approach of mitigation; and development would be compliant with draft Local Plan Policies E4 and NE3 in this regard.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Regulation 63: Appropriate Assessment: Water Quantity and Quality

- 2.190 With regard to the applicant's 'Document to Inform a Habitat Regulations Assessment', impacts of the proposed development on Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay SPA and Ramsar and Sandwich Bay SAC, in respect of water quality and quantity, cannot be ruled out at stage 1 screening, requiring an appropriate assessment in light of avoidance and/or mitigation measures proposed.
- 2.191 The potential impacts are that the designated sites are susceptible to changes in water quality and quantity, with surface water draining from the site to ditches connected to them; that foul drainage would be treated on site and would ultimately drain to the ditch network; and that ground contaminants could be released during the construction phase of development. Measures to promote water efficiency are also identified as warranted.
- 2.192 As set out in the 'Document to Inform a Habitat Regulations Assessment' and considered elsewhere in this report, a range of mitigation measures are proposed to address matters of water and quality, including a construction environmental management plan; intrusive geo environmental assessment work and remediation if necessary; careful storage of fuels, chemicals etc. to avoid spillages; the fitting of pollution control measures on the surface water drainage system; rainwater harvesting

measures; controls over the wastewater treatment plant; and water efficiency measures.

- 2.193 Together, these measures are considered to avoid an adverse effect on integrity of the designated sites from the hotel development alone (or in combination with other plans or projects) as a result of water quality and quantity. Natural England and the SNEO raise no concerns in this regard.

Conclusion

- 2.194 Overall, to conclude on matters of ecology, Government guidance in the Framework (particularly paragraph 186 a) is an important material consideration. Paragraph 186 a) requires that when determining planning applications, local planning authorities should consider that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.
- 2.195 As such, recognising the complex ecological concerns that have been raised and fully considered by the applicant, Natural England, the SNEO and other consultees and interest groups, for the reasons outlined above, Officers consider that when applying the mitigation hierarchy set out in the NPPF, it can be concluded that significant harm to biodiversity will be avoided.

Built Heritage and Archaeology

- 2.196 The Heritage Impact Assessment that accompanies the application identifies nearby designated heritage assets including Cottingham Court Farmhouse, the 'Wall and Outbuilding' and Foulmead (all Grade II listed), as well as other assets in the wider area of Northbourne Conservation Area, Northbourne Park & garden (Grade II* listed) and Hull Place (Grade II listed).
- 2.197 With regard to these heritage assets – the nearest being over a distance of 450m and with limited visibility - the Heritage Impact Assessment considers the proposed development to have no impact upon the significance of their setting. Likewise, for the Betteshanger pithead to the west of the A258, if that is considered a non-designated asset. Even if heritage effects are considered cumulatively with the proposed wave pool scheme (application 22/01158), the Heritage Impact Assessment maintains a considered position of no harm. Consultation advice from the Council's heritage officer verifies the findings of the applicant's Heritage Impact Assessment.
- 2.198 In relation to archaeology, the submitted Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment considers there to be low or moderate potential for remains across prehistoric to post-medieval times, with any surviving archaeology on the Site likely to be of local area significance. Given the development will include below ground intrusions of piling, foundations, services runs, it is reasonable to require a condition for a programme of archaeological investigation to be submitted and agreed in writing by the planning authority, then carried out and findings reported, before development commences.

Noise and Air Quality

- 2.199 The applicant's Noise Assessment identifies that against the ambient noise levels of the Country Park no specific noise mitigation measures for the development are required. In this regard, the Site is considered suitable for the proposed use. Consultation comments from DDC's Environmental Protection team agree with the

applicant's appraisal.

- 2.200 For construction noise, best practice measures including hours of work can be secured through condition.
- 2.201 The site is not located within or in the vicinity of an Air Quality Management Area. For the operation of the development, the applicant's Air Quality Assessment indicates that emissions arising from traffic would result in a negligible impact on local pollutant concentrations. Predicted concentrations remain below the objective levels at all identified receptors. The Air Quality Assessment further concludes that emissions from operational traffic would have an insignificant impact on the Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Ramsar Site and Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI. For the construction phase, suitable mitigation is suggested by the Air Quality Assessment to control dust through a management plan to be secured by condition. Environmental Protection officers agree.

Ground Conditions

- 2.202 Advice from Environmental Protection officers is that further to the Phase 1 Land Contamination Assessment submitted by the applicant, intrusive investigation works are required to fully understand the underlying ground conditions and any associated risks, and to refine measures in respect of ground gas and groundwater monitoring. These matters can be addressed through a series of conditions: for details of intrusive investigation works to be submitted and approved by the planning authority; for the results of that investigation to be provided along with any remedial measures required; for any remediation measures to be carried out and verified; and for any unforeseen contamination to be appropriately dealt with should it arise. A piling risk assessment to be secured by condition is also considered necessary. On this basis, the development is not considered to pose undue geo-environmental risks.

Drainage and Flood Risk

- 2.203 The Site is located within an area of higher risk of flooding from tidal rivers and the sea given its proximity to the coast.
- 2.204 Framework paragraph 167 refers to a Sequential Test to seek to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property. Paragraph 168 explains the aim of the Sequential Test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding – that development should not be permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.
- 2.205 The Framework paragraph 169 recognises that 'wider sustainability objectives' should be considered in respect of whether or not it is possible to locate development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.
- 2.206 The applicant has provided a 'Flood Risk Sequential Test'. This considers whether or not there are any reasonably available alternative sites with a lower risk of flooding on which the development could be built, whilst also being suitable for a high-end hotel. The approach taken has been to screen out sites committed for residential development or being promoted for such and to screen out sites promoted for commercial development, which would not provide a fitting context / relationship for the quality of hotel being proposed.
- 2.207 The applicant has narrowed its search to larger landholdings with parkland characteristics and where they are more conveniently located to an array of tourist

facilities. This approach is considered not unreasonable and meets the National Planning Policy Guidance requirement to take a pragmatic approach.

- 2.208 Eleven comparator sites are identified by the applicant. Of these, ten are discounted because they are located in the AONB, specifically designated for ecology conservation, and /or have an equal or higher risk of flooding than the Site. Of the one remaining comparators at Old Park Hill, Woods and Pastures, to the north of Dover, this site is being managed and restored by Kent Wildlife Trust such that it may not be available, is heavily overgrown with mature trees and vegetation, is steeply sloped and poor access. For these reasons it is discounted. Accordingly, it is considered the 'Flood Risk Sequential Test' demonstrates that there are no reasonably available alternative sites, with a lower flood risk of flooding, for the proposed development to be located, to the satisfaction of the Framework.
- 2.209 Whilst other parts of the Country Park within the control of the applicant have a lower risk of flooding than the Site, these are considered unsuitable for hotel development as they would not provide an appropriately cohesive or integrated relationship with the existing buildings and car park – considered important in the design approach of the development as highlighted in the planning assessment above.
- 2.210 Where development cannot be reasonably located elsewhere, the Framework's Exceptions Test at paragraph 164 should be applied – that it should be demonstrated that a) the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and b) the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.
- 2.211 On the balance of flood risk and wider benefits, the applicant's 'Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy' identifies the consequence to the hotel of a flood event to be minor, with only spa facilities on the lower ground floor affected with a maximum flood depth of 0.19m. All sleeping accommodation and the main entrance would be above the modelled extent of flooding. Outweighing this flood risk are the economic benefits of the development as highlighted in sections of this report above.
- 2.212 Given the minor level of flood risk, occupants of the hotel would remain safe within accommodation on the ground floor and above; and communications to ensure safety can be managed with advanced warning to be provided via the Environment Agency's flood alerts. Given the tidal source of any flooding across a large area, the presence of the hotel building would not increase the risk of flooding through the displacement of flood water storage.
- 2.213 Accordingly, the proposed development is considered to satisfy the Framework's Exceptions Test.
- 2.214 The Environment Agency has considered matters of flood risk – advising it has no objection subject to all sleeping accommodation being at a level no lower than 4.80m AODN.
- 2.215 With regard to surface water drainage, advice from Kent County Council as the LLFA is that it is satisfied with the drainage principles / strategy proposed. Conditions to secure final surface water drainage, including water quality provisions, can be secured by condition.
- 2.216 For foul sewerage from the hotel, the approach presented by the 'Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy' is that it will feed into the existing or upgraded

wastewater treatment plant within the Country Park. Any upgrade would be within the confines of the existing arrangement. A condition to ensure that details of adequate wastewater treatment facilities are submitted and approved before development commences and are available before the development is occupied is recommended. The Site is not within a Groundwater Source Protection Zone’.

2.217 As to whether any further environmental consents or permits are needed, it would be for the applicant to address this with the Environment Agency (with an informative to be added to the planning permission to ensure it is aware of that responsibility).

S.106 Contributions

2.218 Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy emphasises that development that generates demand for infrastructure will only be permitted if the necessary infrastructure to support it is either already in place, or there is a reliable mechanism to ensure that it will be provided at the time it is needed. Draft Local Plan Policy SP11 retains this approach, to ensure infrastructure is delivered at the right time in the right place to meet the growing needs of the district. In light of the consultation responses received and planning assessment above, the obligations at Table 2 are required to be secured through a s.106 agreement.

Table 2: s.106 Contributions

Matter	Obligation
Public access to the Country Park	Covenant for public access to be maintained to the Country Park whilst the hotel and spa remains operational at no charge for entry to the Country Park with exceptions allowing for the park to be closed to the public for example for maintenance and special events and public holidays (including Christmas day)
Country Park wide ecological and biodiversity management plan	An Ecological and Biodiversity Management Plan to be submitted and agreed before occupation of development. Ecological and Biodiversity Management Plan to include specific measures and targets, against which annual monitoring shall be provided
Habitat and biodiversity enhancement scheme	‘Habitat and Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Scheme’ for the Site, the Country Park, Hammill Field and land adjacent to the east of the Country Park to be submitted and agreed before commencement of development. The ‘Habitat and Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Scheme’ shall include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specific biodiversity aims and objectives - a ‘biodiversity gain plan’ to demonstrate how a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain will be achieved - biodiversity enhancement measures - a timetable / programme for carrying out the measures - details of the management and maintenance of the enhancement measures - ongoing monitoring and reporting of the enhancement

	<p>measures</p>
<p>Visitor and turtle dove management</p>	<p>To establish zonal areas of 'Core Visitor', 'Informal Access' and 'Restricted Access' across the Country Park.</p> <p>To provide a detailed 'Visitor Management Plan' with specific aims and objectives for each zonal area.</p> <p>To provide a detailed 'Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy' for the Country Park.</p> <p>Implementation of measures contained in the 'Visitor Management Plan' and 'Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy', including offsite measures at Hammill Field and adjacent to the east of the Country Park.</p> <p>To establish a 'Turtle Dove Survey and Monitoring Regime'.</p> <p>To submit each year to the local planning authority for review the 'Visitor Management Plan' and 'Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy' and results of the 'Turtle Dove Survey and Monitoring Regime'.</p> <p>To revise the 'Visitor Management Plan' and 'Turtle Dove Mitigation Strategy' with initiatives to promote the Country Park for the favourable conservation status of turtle doves and implement those initiatives in response to any negative findings of the 'Turtle Dove Survey and Monitoring Regime'.</p> <p>To establish a 'Full Time Designated Wildlife Warden' for the Country Park, along with specific roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>To make an annual contribution of £6,000 (index linked) to the local planning authority in respect of the monitoring, consideration and enforcement of matters relating to visitor and turtle dove management.</p>
<p>Fiery Clearwing</p>	<p>Dock plant seeding establishment and management measures to be submitted and approved for identified dock receptor</p>

	<p>area.</p> <p>Dock translocation and management plan to be submitted and approved, as relating to the development site and dock receptor area.</p> <p>Monitoring of mitigation / compensation measures, to be undertaken on dock receptor area against objective targets. If secured measures were to be failing objective targets, an alternative approach to mitigation / compensation to avoid significant harm to be provided.</p>
Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area SAMP	A contribution of £56,886 (index linked) towards Strategic Access Mitigation and Monitoring Strategy
Shuttle bus service	Details of provision of a shuttle bus service, to be available 365 days per year, to transport hotel employees to / from the site from nearby towns / villages within the district.
Improvements to Northbourne Road / A256 junction	Enter into s.278 agreement and carry out junction mitigation works at Northbourne Road / A256 junction before occupation of the hotel development and separately proposed wave pool scheme.
Whitfield Roundabout Junction	A contribution towards improvement works at the Whitfield Roundabout junction. To be determined.
Public rights of way improvements	<p>A sum of £100,000 (index linked) for works to improve public rights of way in the vicinity of Betteshanger Country Park including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clearance and surface repair to Public Bridleway ED4 and Public Footpath ED3, routing between the Country Park and Deal; - surface repairs to Public Bridleway EE385; - complete resurface of Byway Open to all Traffic EE245; - clearance and reinstate width, including the link onto the England Coast Path, and resurface works to Public Footpath EE462 – EE245, EE462; - resurface of Public Footpath EE247; - reinstate width, clearance and surface section to Public Bridleway EE232; - surface section, clear and widen to Public Bridleway EE233; - surface clearance, repair, tree work – restricted Byway EE494 and Public Footpath EE365.

3. Conclusion and Planning Balance

3.1 The starting point for decision making is the adopted development plan. Decisions should be taken in accordance with the policies in the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 3.2 The Framework is an important material consideration and its definition of sustainable development is set out at the start of this report. Its three overarching objectives, as well as specific paragraphs mentioned throughout the report, are important in considering the overall planning balance of the proposed development.
- 3.3 National Planning Policy Guidance states that provided regard is had to all material considerations, it is for the decision maker to decide what weight is to be given to the material considerations in each case, and (subject to the test of reasonableness) the courts will not get involved in the question of weight.
- 3.4 Key policies of relevance, to the determination of this application, in particular DM1, DM11 and DM15, cannot be awarded full weight due to being considered out of date and not being fully in compliance with the Framework. Likewise, a number of the draft policies in the emerging Local Plan, including Policy E4 and SP13, cannot be afforded full weight at this stage.
- 3.5 In relation to ecology, this resubmitted application has sought to address the previous resolved reason for refusal relating to the impact on the turtle dove species. This includes the provision of mitigation / compensation in the form of managing / improving existing habitat at the Country Park (to reduce impacts visitors / make it more suitable for turtle doves), on a nearby site (Hammill Fields) and on a parcel of land to the east of the Country Park.
- 3.6 Significant consideration has been given to the level of certainty that can be attached to the effectiveness of mitigation measures proposed by the Outline Visitor Management and Turtle Dove Strategy. With provision for mitigation measures to adapt as necessary through a monitoring regime, which would be secured through planning obligations, it is considered that the proposal does not result in significant harm to ecology.
- 3.7 Regarding fiery clear wing moths, Officers consider that with an extended period to allow implementation of development it is reasonably likely that a protected species licence would be granted, based on the outlined mitigation / compensation measures. There would also be monitoring of the success of these measures and an adaptive approach to require further provisions should it be necessary to do so. Such measures, coupled with the protection of the licensing regime, would in Officers' view ensure that significant harm is avoided.
- 3.8 Inevitably there would be some disruption to the biodiversity and wildlife of the Country Park as a result of the development, but with the avoidance, mitigation and/ or compensatory measures proposed, this would not be significant. Nevertheless, that less-than-significant disturbance is still afforded minor negative weight.
- 3.9 Harm to the character and appearance of the Country Park (which also took into account of the loss of some of the open space) was identified by the Planning Committee in its resolution on application 22/01152. The previously identified harm to character and appearance of the Country Park is considered to be moderate, but remains under this application, weighing against the scheme. (In the cumulative scenario, should the proposed wave pool scheme and hotel scheme both be granted and delivered, there are greater visual impacts where both developments would be seen together in shorter views, but the officer view is that this greater impact would be balanced against the greater benefits of the two schemes).
- 3.10 The Site's designation as open space is important and in particular the quality of the

Country Park is recognised. Although Core Strategy Policy DM25 generally seeks to retain such open space, there is not a blanket ban on any loss where a number of exceptions might apply – which is consistent with the Framework. In this case, given an identified surplus of semi/natural green space across the district, the loss of open space is considered to be policy compliant.

- 3.11 To balance against the identified harm are the public benefits of the scheme. The commitment of the applicant to secure public access to the Country Park, an Asset of Community Value, is a very important benefit which can be afforded very significant weight. This is significant in enabling the Country Park to continue to provide an important asset for the public and to contribute to the Framework's social objective in providing an accessible open space. This is a key difference between these proposals and the previous hotel application (22/01152) and is considered a material consideration in overcoming the previous resolution to refuse that hotel scheme in respect of loss of open space.
- 3.12 Other social benefits, that include the provision of recreational facilities for people to enjoy (through the spa and restaurant), carry moderate weight in support of the development.
- 3.13 The economic benefits of the proposed development are also significant. Given the importance of tourism and the visitor economy to Dover District (as set out in the current and emerging development plan and 'Growth strategy for tourism and the visitor economy 2020 to 2030') and provisions for a high-end hotel facility for which a need has been identified, it is reasonable to afford these benefits very substantial weight. This weighs strongly in respect of the Framework's economic objective in supporting growth and contributing to a strong and competitive economy.
- 3.14 These benefits as material considerations are considered sufficient to justify the grant of planning permission.

g) Recommendation

- I That PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED subject to a Section 106 legal agreement to secure necessary planning contributions set out above (Table 2) and subject to the following conditions to include:
- 1) Time limit – seven years
 - 2) Approved plans
 - 3) Details of external materials to be submitted
 - 4) Details of appearance of expressed timber frame to be submitted
 - 5) Details of window frames, and wooden louvres on windows and balconies to be submitted
 - 6) Details of window reveals to be submitted
 - 7) Details of measures informed by Secured by Design principles to be submitted
 - 8) Details of 5% of hotel rooms to be wheelchair accessible to be approved
 - 9) BREEAM Very Good to be secured
 - 10) Construction waste minimisation and recycling plan to be submitted
 - 11) Hard and soft landscaping details, including tree planting, to be submitted
 - 12) Details of reedbed creation and its hydrological function to be submitted
 - 13) Tree protection measures to be submitted

- 14) Piling risk assessment for any piling operations
- 15) Geo-environmental intrusive assessment report to be approved
- 16) Details of any geo-environmental remediation to be approved
- 17) Verification report of effectiveness of remediation measures to be approved
- 18) Unforeseen contamination
- 19) Environmental and transport construction management plan including details of access, parking, wheel washing, timing of HGV movements; temporary traffic management, compounds, hoarding, temporary buildings, temporary lighting, control of dust, control of noise/vibrations, working hours, procedures for complaint management
- 20) Details of surface water drainage measures during construction
- 21) Car parking to be provided before occupation
- 22) Cycle parking to be provided before occupation
- 23) Electric vehicle parking details to be approved
- 24) Parking management plan and signage strategy to be approved
- 25) Travel plan to be approved
- 26) Lighting details to be approved – of external lighting and internal lighting with external spill out
- 27) Water efficiency measures to be approved
- 28) No development to commence until protected species licence in respect of impact to fiery clearwing moths is obtained
- 29) No development to commence until survey work for Sussex Emerald Moth demonstrates there to be no impact upon that species or a protected species licence in respect of impact to Sussex Emerald Moth is obtained
- 30) Details of water vole mitigation and of clearance of pond habitat areas to be submitted
- 31) Details of habitat manipulation and of clearance of reptiles from the Site to be submitted
- 32) Details of badger mitigation, of temporary sett closure during construction works, to be submitted
- 33) Construction ecological management plan – to include mammal safeguards
- 34) Clearance of vegetation – outside bird nesting season or under ecological supervision
- 35) Beavers – additional survey work and mitigation strategy if necessary to be submitted
- 36) Detailed surface water drainage scheme to be submitted and agreed prior to commencement
- 37) Verification of implemented surface water drainage scheme to be approved
- 38) Details of foul water drainage to be submitted and agreed prior to commencement
- 39) Programme of archaeological investigation to be carried out before commencement in accordance with details to be agreed
- 40) Prohibition of dogs staying with overnight hotel visitors
- 41) Prohibition of visitor, recreational electric vehicle use within the Country Park, beyond the main access roadway and car park

II Powers to be delegated to the Head of Planning and Development to settle any necessary planning conditions and s.106 obligations in line with the issues set out in the recommendation and as resolved by the Planning Committee.

