

Application No: 16/00281/FULL Full Application

Site: Land Of Roeshot (rear Of Cat And Fiddle p.y.o), Hampshire BH23 7DN

Proposal: Change of Use of land to use as informal open air recreation space including (but not limited to) use as suitable alternative greenspace (SANG)

Applicant: Mr Meyrick, Christchurch Environmental Management Ltd

Case Officer: Deborah Slade

Parish: BRANSGORE

1. REASON FOR COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

Referred by Authority Member.

2. DEVELOPMENT PLAN DESIGNATION

Adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest

3. PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

DP1 General Development Principles
CP1 Nature Conservation Sites of International Importance
CP2 The Natural Environment
DP3 Open Space

4. SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

Development Standards SPD

5. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Sec 1 - Building a strong, competitive economy
Sec 3 - Supporting a prosperous rural economy
Sec 6 - Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes
Sec 8 - Promoting healthy communities
Sec 11 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Sec 12 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Sec 13 - Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

6. MEMBER COMMENTS

None received

7. PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS

Bransgore Parish Council: Happy to accept the officer's decision under delegated powers. The special character of the Avon Valley should be protected from urbanisation and loss of character.

8. CONSULTEES

- 8.1 Ecologist: Objection on grounds of lack of survey information on certain protected species.
- 8.2 Landscape Officer: Objection: It is not possible to assess the landscape impact of the proposal from the information submitted.
- 8.3 New Forest District Council - Development Control: No objection to the proposal. NFDC have granted permission for the Central SANG, subject to conditions and informatives.
- 8.4 Dorset County Council - Minerals and Waste: No comments received.
- 8.5 Natural England: Objection on grounds of lack of information.
- 8.6 Hampshire County Council - Minerals and Waste: No comments received.
- 8.7 Christchurch Borough Council (Planning Policy): The proposal is too far remote of the Christchurch housing allocation to function as a SANG.
- 8.8 East Dorset Planning: No comments received.
- 8.9 HCC Access Development Officer (Planning): No comments received.
- 8.10 Environmental Protection (NFDC): The site is a disused pit which was then a landfill that accepted inert/ construction materials. An informative note regarding contamination should be added to any consent granted.
- 8.11 RSPB South East Regional Office: No comments received.
- 8.12 Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust: Objection on grounds that insufficient information has been provided regarding the potential impact on protected species.
- 8.13 Hampshire County Council Flood and Water Management: No comments.
- 8.14 Archaeologist: No objection subject to condition.
- 8.15 Land Drainage (NFDC): No comments related to the eastern SANG.

9. REPRESENTATIONS

9.1 No representations received.

10. RELEVANT HISTORY

10.1 Construction of internal access road to the existing access to the A35 to serve the proposed Roeshot Quarry (16/00277) ~ decision pending.

11. ASSESSMENT

11.1 This is the first application the Authority has received for the change of use of land within the New Forest National Park to informal open space to meet the needs arising from development outside the National Park. The site comprises an area of agricultural land of 7 hectares within the National Park. Part of the site was a former gravel pit. To the west of the site is a footpath and the boundary with New Forest District Council. Almost immediately to the north is Burton Common SSSI, just beyond a proposed haulage road for the 87 hectare minerals extraction site at Roeshot allocated within the adopted Hampshire Minerals & Waste Plan (2013). To the south is a 'pick your own' farm, which also lies within the National Park, and beyond it, the A35. To the east is further agricultural land. The site forms part of the Hinton Admiral Estate.

11.2 The proposal is to change the use of the land from agriculture to an area of informal open air recreation space, including its use as an area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (a 'SANG'). The application was submitted on the basis of providing alternative recreational space for the residents of the allocated Christchurch Urban Extension. This would encourage recreation and dog walks in a more robust area than sensitive areas such as the Dorset Heathlands, Burton Common SSSI and New Forest SPA areas within the National Park. This application forms one of three linked planning applications, and this would be the 'eastern SANG' which would be linked to two other SANG areas within NFDC and Christchurch Borough via a 'green corridor'. New Forest District Council granted planning permission for the change of use of agricultural land within the district to use as natural green space in June 2016 subject to conditions.

11.3 In principle there is no objection to providing informal recreation space in appropriate areas of the National Park to offset pressures on more sensitive sites and such an approach is supported within the Core Strategy (Policy CP3). The area of land proposed currently has limited public access through the footpath network from the A35 towards Waterditch and Neacroft. Apart from the A35, the area is tranquil and not part of the National Park which is widely used for recreation by visitors, although it is used locally by residents of the area. There are sensitive habitats

adjacent to the site in the form of the Burton Common SSSI and therefore the Authority has to consider the potential impact of the proposal upon this nationally designated site of ecological importance, in accordance with Policy CP2 of the Core Strategy and Section 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

11.4 Planning applications to change the use of land to recreational open space/ SANG use are more common in other parts of the country, outside nationally designated landscapes such as the New Forest National Park. Natural England's 'Guidelines on the Creation of SANGs' (2008) sets out a range of **essential** characteristics for a successful SANG, including (but not limited to):

- SANGs must be designed so that visitors are not deterred by safety concerns;
- SANGs must be perceived as natural spaces without intrusive artificial structures;
- SANGS must be free from unpleasant visual, auditory or olfactory intrusions; and
- Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted.

These criteria are particular relevant in considering this proposed change of use, which would be located immediately adjacent to a large scale minerals extraction site (with its associated haulage route, bunding and crushing plant).

11.5 The proposed SANG site has the potential to alleviate some recreational pressures on the adjacent 40-hectare Burton Common SSSI and the internationally protected habitats in the National Park. However, to determine this the Authority requires full details on the scheme to assess whether the proposals would fulfil their intended purpose. The assessment of this proposal in the National Park must also consider the immediate proximity of the designated SSSI at Burton Common, which is classified as being in 'unfavourable-recovering' condition by Natural England. This additional consideration in the National Park element of the SANG proposal is highlighted by the fact that Natural England have objected to the application submitted within the Park, but not to the proposed western or central SANGs which are not adjacent to a SSSI. Changing the use of adjacent land to recreational space has the potential to compound recreational impacts upon the SSSI and therefore detailed consideration of the proposal and its likely impacts upon adjacent ecology are required.

11.6 Natural England, the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the Authority's own Ecologist all raise objections to the application on the grounds that the SANG would not meet its purpose of mitigating against any specific housing allocation; that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would not place additional pressures upon Burton Common SSSI; that the landscape concept drawing is not sufficiently detailed; that it is unclear how

the SANG will work in proximity to the minerals site; and that insufficient survey information has been received in relation to certain species e.g. Southern Damselfly, Skylark and Lapwing. The applicant has acknowledged that further survey work is required, but this has yet to be carried out. The applicant has updated their 2012 SANG strategy on a 'confidential' basis, so it cannot be taken into account as a material consideration, particularly by consultees.

11.7 The applicant proposes that the SANG would mitigate against additional recreational impacts derived from the housing development delivered as part of the allocated Christchurch Urban Extension. However, it remains unclear what the scale of this development would be, with options ranging from 500 dwellings to over 1,000 dwellings. Christchurch Borough Council is anticipating the submission of an application for a smaller residential development (circa 500 dwellings) and SANG area to be located south of the railway line at Roeshot Hill imminently. If this application is submitted, the change of use application now being considered by the Authority north of the railway line would no longer be linked to a specific housing development and there would be no mechanism to secure the SANG north of the railway line to housing development south of it.

11.8 Despite repeated requests for additional details on the layout and phasing of the proposals, the plans remain labelled as being 'for illustrative purposes only'. The application has therefore been submitted as essentially a red line application with no firm details provided as to the layout of the SANG and the various habitats and landscapes it could accommodate. Consequently it is not possible for the Authority (and consultees) to assess whether the proposed SANG is fit for purpose and to have confidence that it will fulfil its intended function to divert pressures from the protected habitats of the Dorset Heathlands and the New Forest. Although the applicant has stated that they would accept conditions regarding the final layout of the site, this approach has yet to be agreed with Natural England. It has been confirmed that no car park is intended for the Eastern SANG, but matters relating to the provision of paths, ponds, interpretation boards, fencing and lighting have not been resolved. It is therefore not possible to adequately assess the landscape impact of the proposal on the National Park and an objection has been raised by the Authority's Landscape Officer on this basis. Given that land within the National Park benefits from the highest level of landscape protection, it is considered reasonable to require details of proposed landscape character of the proposal at this stage, rather than to leave this consideration wholly to planning conditions.

11.9 As there are still uncertainties about the potential for the land to fulfil its intended SANG function, the Authority has considered the option of amending the description of the development to just grant planning permission for the change of use of the land to

informal recreation space. However, it is still not possible to do this at the present time because the potential recreational impacts upon protected species and the SSSI, as well as the landscape character of the National Park, have still not been satisfactorily resolved. The applicant was made aware of officers' concerns about lack of information prior to the registration of the application, however very little additional information has been forthcoming during the course of the application. At this point there is no management plan submitted and therefore it is unclear how the SANG would be delivered and managed in perpetuity.

11.10 At this juncture it is therefore recommended that planning permission is refused as there are a number of significant matters that have not been satisfactorily resolved. It remains unclear:

- what the intended function of the proposed SANG area is - whether it is a stand-alone strategic area of recreational space to meet the needs arising in the wider area, or explicitly linked to the future residential development north of Christchurch
- how the SANG area could fulfil its intended legal function given the potential conflicts caused by the proximity of the large scale minerals allocation
- the relationship between the SANG area (where public access would be encouraged) and the adjacent SSSI - a concern highlighted in the objections received from a range of ecological consultees
- the potential landscape impact of the change of use on the National Park, given that all of the plans submitted are labelled as 'for illustrative purposes only'.

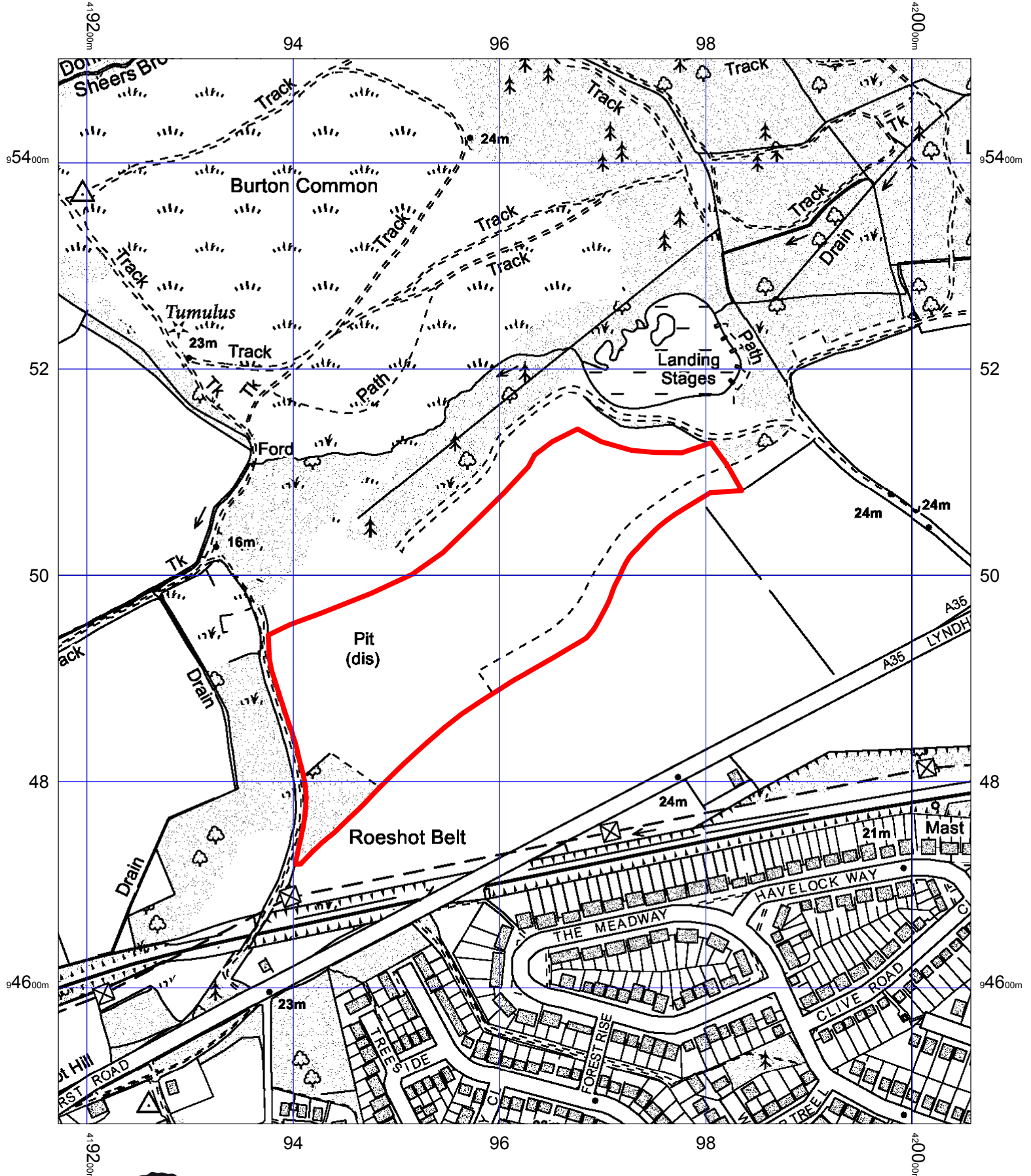
This is unlikely to be the last application received by the Authority for recreational / SANG use within the National Park and it is essential that sufficient information is provided at the planning application stage to enable a full assessment of the proposals. Finally, it should be emphasised that officers remain willing to consider a revised application which adequately addresses the issues set out above.

12. **RECOMMENDATION**

Refuse

Reason(s)

- 1 It has not been demonstrated that the proposal would uphold the ecological integrity of protected species populations, the adjacent SSSI (Burton Common), or the landscape character of the area. It is not clear that the proposal would divert impacts away from the New Forest SPA, given the distance from the development which it seeks to mitigate. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies DP1, CP2, CP8, CP3 and CP6 of the New Forest National Park Core Strategy and Development Management Policies (DPD) (December 2010).



**NEW FOREST
NATIONAL PARK**

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