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12th December 2016

Dear Deborah,

**Reference: Proposed housing development north of Stoke Park Wood
(Forest Enterprise managed Public Forest Estate):**

The Forest Enterprise (FE) South England Forest District as managers of the 90 hectare (ha) Stoke Park Woods (SPW) in Eastleigh Borough would welcome the opportunity to comment in greater detail about any form of development along the northern boundary of this important ancient woodland site. FE is keen to ensure that any potential impacts to the natural environment at SPW are adequately addressed in order to arrive at a positive outcome for society and the environment.

Housing developments are already under construction at the North East and North West corners of the wood. Any further development should seek to protect, buffer and connect the wooded areas within the Itchen plain and surrounding environs including SPW.

SPW forms an important refugia for biodiversity in the local landscape and has been flagged up as being of County importance for wildlife through its selection as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) or Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). It functions as a vital green space for both local residents and a wider catchment of people in the increasingly built-up South Coast Plain. Ongoing ancient and native woodland restoration during the past couple of decades has been improving the quality of Lowland mixed deciduous woodland and Wet woodland in SPW, both habitats being listed as nationally important UK BAP Priority and Section 41 NERC Act (2006) habitats respectively. Of particular note a variety of European listed woodland bat species have been recorded in SPW.

The northern edge of SPW now exists as the last boundary of the wood to adjoin undeveloped open land. Previous developments along the majority of the wood's other perimeters have left little or no buffer between the woodland boundary and the footprint of neighbouring properties. This process has resulted in the loss of important transition zones between woodland and open space and has served to make SPW an ever more isolated ecological unit/habitat patch.

It is likely that the combined effects of existing and proposed development activity (aside from the physical loss of habitat and increased light and noise levels together with elevated visitor pressure (in the absence of adequately resourced access infrastructure)) will compromise the sites ecological integrity. Historic, current and upcoming development projects have served to isolate SPW and functional connectivity between SPW and the Itchen basin has all but disappeared at the woods Southern margin.

FE has serious concerns regarding the potential bio-security impacts of garden waste being deposited on the margins of SPW and other ancient woodland blocks where gardens immediately adjoin woodland boundaries with no effective buffer. There is a high risk of invasive plant establishment and the spread of plant pathogens harmful to native vegetation and tree health with a significant financial liability to public, private and non-governmental land managers.

The potential impact on the woodland of increased total volumes of water arising from developments on land at a higher level also needs to be considered in more detail. We would welcome the opportunity of being involved in such discussions at an early stage of the planning process as part of an overall consideration of the potential impact of flooding downstream.

Please see below some key considerations/opportunities that we would be keen to explore further in order to arrive at a sustainable outcome for SPW. These points arise following a recent discussion between the South District's Estates, Operations and Planning & Environment teams:

1. Any development adjoining the FE managed land at SPW should avoid backing immediately on to this Ancient Woodland block selected as a wildlife site of County importance and ideally a viable 'ecological buffer' should be considered which may include an area dedicated to wildlife rather than a narrow corridor with limited ecological benefit;
2. A viable buffer might be in the environs of 10-15 ha of land dedicated to wildlife use and for informal recreation to help alleviate the additional pressure placed on an already sensitive habitat and to help to offset the impacts on focal

woodland species e.g. Woodland Bird Index (WBI) species including those associated with scrub and damp woodland;

3. Developer funded internal woodland access infrastructure and interpretation at key access points will help to better manage the increasing levels of public visitation.

As a public body we support the Government's agenda of economic development and housing provision and by taking a holistic approach similar to Natural England's Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace initiative, a more sustainable and long term benefit can be derived for such a locally important and sensitive site as SPW. Development on the fringes of the wood provides an opportunity for appropriate Green Infrastructure measures to be put in place to address the necessary ecological and recreational mitigation and biodiversity offset actions required to make the development sustainable in the long term without increasing management costs to neighbouring landowners and managers.

Yours sincerely,



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