

Date: 22 June 2026
Our ref: 550289
Your ref: EN010158
IP Ref: [REDACTED]



FAO: Richard Morgan
Lead Panel Member

The Planning Inspectorate
c/o QUADIENT
69 Buckingham Avenue
Slough
SL1 4PN

Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Rosefieldsolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk &
Submitted via PINS portal

Dear Richard Morgan,

NSIP Reference: EN010158

**The Examining Authority's first written questions and requests for information (ExQ2).
Examining Authority's submission deadline: 22 June 2026**

Natural England is pleased to provide our answers to the Examining Authority's Second Written Questions within the annex appended to this letter. Natural England hopes our Deadline 4 answers are helpful. We note that Deadline 4 requests an update to the Principal Areas of Disagreement Summary Statements (PADSS), however we have not included an update for this deadline as there are no substantive changes and our previous version is still relevant.

Please note that Natural England have used **no** artificial intelligence tools to develop any of our advice or to assist with any document review.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

For further advice on this consultation please contact the case officer Jonathan Shavelar
[REDACTED] [\[REDACTED\]@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@naturalengland.org.uk) and copy to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,

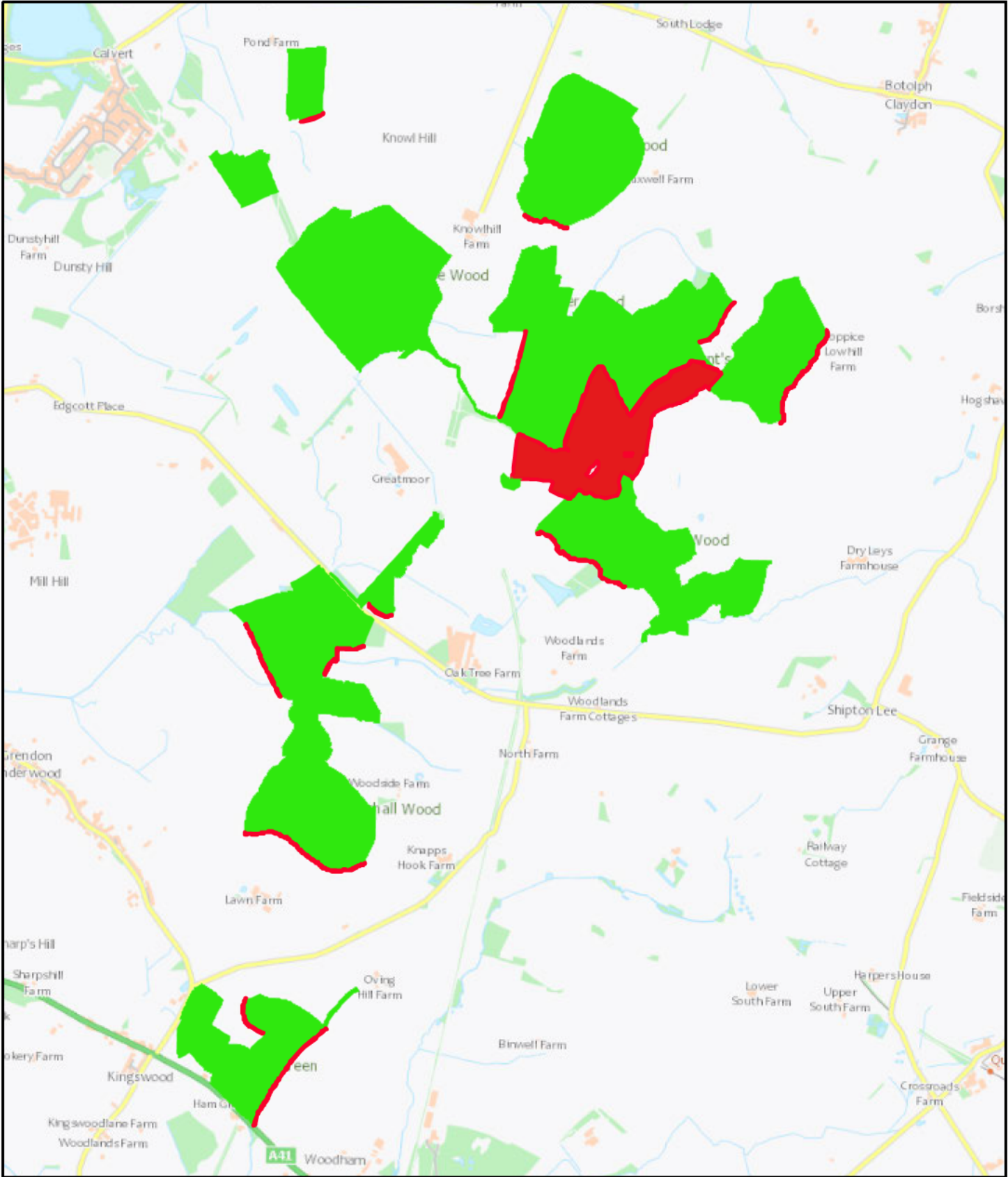
[REDACTED]
Senior Officer
Thames Solent Area Team
Natural England

Annex 1: Natural England's response to the Examining Authority's (ExA's) second written questions (ExQ2)

ExQ2	Question to:	Question and Answer:
5. Biodiversity and Ecology		
2.5.1	Natural England	<i>Proposed Bernwood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – Mapping</i> <i>Please submit into the examination the draft mapping for the proposed Bernwood SSSI boundary.</i>
		Natural England had produced a draft sketch map of the proposed SSSI boundary which was intended for internal use only. As part of a Freedom of Information Request, this draft map was released. We have attached a high resolution copy with our response and hope this is helpful.
2.5.2	Natural England	<i>Proposed Bernwood SSSI – Mapping</i> <i>Given your comments in paragraph 1.11 of [REP3-061] regarding the importance of fields B6, B7, B8 and likely also B3 as key foraging habitat for Bechstein's bats please explain why fields B3, B6, B7 and B8 are not included in the draft mapping for the proposed Bernwood SSSI boundary (as clarified in paragraph 4.1 of the same document)?</i>
		The agricultural fields included in the SSSI designation are located between Finemere Wood, Greatsea Wood and Balmore Wood. From radio tracking data we have compelling evidence that these fields are used frequently and extensively by Bechstein's bats present within these woodlands. If these agricultural fields were not included in the designation, it would severely limit the benefit of designating the other areas, as the SSSI would be disjointed and too heavily roost-focussed to fulfil the current SSSI designation criteria for bats. There is radio tracking evidence showing Bechstein's use the grasslands between Shrubs Wood, Decoypond Wood and Sheephouse Wood. Despite clearly being shown to be an area used by commuting and foraging bats, there are fewer roosts in these woodlands and fewer bats were recorded using this area compared to the area included within the draft mapping.

ExQ2	Question to:	Question and Answer:
		The SSSI designation had to be restricted to suitable woodlands for roosting and foraging and only the most critical supporting habitat, the loss of which would render the rest of the SSSI designation much less effective at supporting and protecting the population. It should be noted that the designation was being progressed on an understanding that it would help to highlight the importance of the whole area, especially the core sustenance zone surrounding the designated areas, for this important population of rare bats, and motivate and facilitate protection (and ideally enhancement). There is a considerable difference between something being of such paramount importance and value that it can be designated as a SSSI, and an area of valuable supporting habitat. We would highlight that Natural England's advice in relation to the potential impacts of the development proposal on the Bechstein's bat population has not, at any point, been based on the assumption that these fields would be included in the proposed SSSI. The Applicant recognised the importance of the proposed SSSI in their Environmental Statement and their approach to considering this was accepted by Natural England early on in our relevant representations [RR-203]. The pastureland across the area labelled 'B' (as well as the C fields and the D fields) remain of importance for the Bechstein's bats and form part of the core sustenance zone. In our previous representations [REP1-124, AS-038, REP2-098, PD-010 and REP3-061] we have set out in great detail why we advise the development proposal, as currently proposed, has the potential to cause harm to the population of Bechstein's bats. This has always been irrespective of the proposed SSSI and this is mirrored in the structure of our comments as well as the Applicant's Environmental Statement.

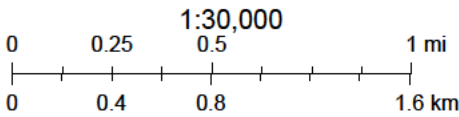
Bernwood Proposed SSSI



14/02/2024

Woodland and grassland habitats; Agricultural land and Buffers_14Feb24

- Agricultural Land and Buffers
- Woodland and grassland habitats
- World_Regions



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