

Seymour, James
Fri 12/17/2021 7:26 PM

Dear Hazel

Thank you for your email below and for your email to Tony Juniper, who has asked me to respond on his behalf. Local communities valuing and recognising rich local wildlife sites are key to helping them get embraced in future plans.

In terms of your query about SSSI designation, Natural England is assessing the need to increase the series of sites designated for nature by 2030, as part of Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan. This is an England-wide project across all types of habitat. Lowland meadow is under consideration as part of the project and we believe that the Sussex and Kent Weald is a hotspot for these wildflower and waxcap grasslands. However, we are at the start of a five year project to establish the need and then identify possible sites across the country that may join the national pipeline for consideration ([link](#)).

In terms of Benenden Hospital, since our last contact, we have been advised of further information on the site's species from surveys undertaken in 2014 and 2018. Following confirmation by our national specialist, the site will be added to the [priority habitat inventory](#) for lowland meadow and we are actioning this.

In terms of Local Plan policies, Natural England has advised on the policies contained within the Submission Tunbridge Wells Local Plan. For example EN1 5.2 – 'Proposals that affect existing biodiversity...must be designed to avoid, mitigate, or compensate for any potential harm, resulting in a net gain' and the associated Design Checklist Section 5, as well as policies EN9 and EN10. These policies can provide for the LWS and the lowland meadow Biodiversity Opportunity Area to be considered as part of the development consent process for any individual planning application on the site. The low likelihood of being able to translocate or replace grassland fungi habitat would also need to be considered in any development proposal by the local authority.

Please be assured that we will be continuing to work closely to provide our advice and support to Tunbridge Wells Borough Council as the Plan progresses through the Examination stage in 2022, collectively working to secure a nature-positive outcome for people and nature.

To assist NE in replying to future correspondence please direct to our correspondence unit (naturalenglandcorrespondenceunit@naturalengland.org.uk). I am always happy to receive updates on the local situation.

Kind Regards

James Seymour, Area Manager Sussex & Kent

Natural England