

APPLICATION NO.	P16/S3133/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	20.9.2016
PARISH	LITTLE WITTENHAM
WARD MEMBER(S)	Jane Murphy Sue Lawson Pat Dawe
APPLICANT	Earth Trust
SITE	Earth Trust Centre, Little Wittenham, OX14 4QZ
PROPOSAL	The creation of a new access track from Sires Hill and the formation of new car parking areas, erection of a new skills and learning building, erection of an amphitheatre, conversion of existing office to cafe (with small farm shop), conversion of existing learning barn to office space, erection of three new barns, erection of replica roundhouses, all associated structures, landscaping, drainage and earthworks.
AMENDMENTS	As amplified by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information received 9 November 2016 clarifying arrangements for coach parking and changing facilities for cyclists, • scheduled monument assessment, design and access statement update and additional supporting information received 13 December 2016.
GRID REFERENCE	456282/192390
OFFICER	Katherine Canavan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The extent of the land within the Earth Trust's guardianship (beyond the application area) sits close to several different parish boundaries, and therefore consultation was carried out with all four, nearby parishes (see section 3). The application has been referred to the Planning Committee because objections and concerns have been raised by some of the parishes, which conflict with the officer recommendation to approve the development.

1.2 The Earth Trust comprises a small group of buildings accessed via Hollow Way, with an agricultural track running south-west of the site to Hill Farm. The wider land ownership of the Trust covers 500ha of open countryside, including The Wittenham Clumps.

To the north of the site runs a single track road - Hollow Way Road, which links Little Wittenham and Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (via Sires Hill); to the south runs Sires Hill, a relatively fast, rural road, which links the A4130 and Long Wittenham. The closest dwellings are two small cottages known as Hillside Cottages, and Wittenham Hill situated northwest of the application site. A small group of dwellings is located on Sires Hill to the south of the application area, and close to the proposed relocation of the access.

- 1.3 Area designations and site constraints:
- North Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
 - Area of archaeological significance
 - Public right of way: Little Wittenham Footpath 6
 - Scheduled monuments: Sinodun Hill Camp, and Brightwell Barrow
 - Protected species identified in local area
 - Little Wittenham Nature Reserve, and Special area of conservation

1.4 A Location plan of the site is **attached** at Appendix 1.

2.0 **PROPOSAL**

2.1 The applicant seeks full planning permission for a three-phase development to improve the facilities, access and parking at the Earth Trust Centre, Little Wittenham. The elements of each phase are set out on pages 20-21 of the Statement of Community Involvement, and Figure 1 of the Design and Access Statement.

- Phase 1: Learning facilities, iron-age roundhouse education area and farm barns
- Phase 2: Access, track and parking; cycleways and footpaths; open air amphitheatre; festival field car park; and third farm barn
- Phase 3: On-site cafe

A three-phase approach is being proposed to allow the charitable organisation to effectively manage the funding process, implementing the development over a 7-8 year period.

2.2 Reduced copies of the plans accompanying the application are **attached** at Appendix 2. Full copies of the plans and consultation responses are available for inspection on the Council's website at www.southoxon.gov.uk.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1	Technical advisers:	Advice on original proposal	Advice on revised proposal
	Countryside Officer	Support, subject to conditions	As previously advised
	Drainage Engineer - MONSON	No strong views, subject to conditions	As previously advised
	Economic Development	No strong views, on the basis that the development will provide jobs, and the improved facilities would support local expenditure and tourism.	
	Forestry Officer	Support, subject to conditions	As previously advised
	Health & Housing - Contaminated Land	No strong views	As previously advised
	Health & Housing – Environmental Protection / Noise	Holding objection - further information required on noise levels associated with amphitheatre, and risk to nearby dwellings	No strong views, further to receipt of additional information, and subject to conditions
	Health & Housing - Food Safety	Standard advice provided – Food establishments must be registered	As previously advised

	with the council	
Historic England (South East)	Holding objection - no detailed assessment of the significance of the scheduled monuments, and no assessment of the potential impact of the development with regard to their setting	
Landscape Architect - SODC	Support, subject to minor alterations to detail , and conditions	
National Grid, and SGN Plant Protection Teams	Standard advice provided, with National Grid map for site	
Natural England	No objection - the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites or protected landscapes.	As previously advised
North Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Board	No objection, subject to conditions Plans reflect previous AONB advice. However, concerns raised over some details: anomaly in construction vehicle arrangements, erosion of Hollow Way, overly dense tree planting along track and access track design.	
Highways and transport (OCC)	Holding objection - further information required on coach / bus parking arrangements, and shower facilities for cyclists.	Following receipt of information clarifying coach visits and turning, and cycle facility arrangements, outstanding issues have been addressed. No strong views, subject to legal agreements and conditions.
Public Rights of Way Officer (OCC)	Support, subject to conditions and ongoing discussion as separate statutory legal process	Further changes required to PROW – flexibility should be built into the planning conditions / detail to allow for this
Archaeology (OCC)	No strong views, subject to conditions	As previously advised
3.2 Parish councils	Advice on original proposal	Advice on revised proposal
Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Parish Council	Recommend refusal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harm to historic landscape • Adverse impact of proposed access road 	
Little Wittenham Parish Council	Support, but with reservations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in traffic through Little Wittenham is supported • Concern that proposed access track will 	Approval of amended plans – NB. previous

	<p>not be implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate security arrangements required for car park • Parking charges would dissuade use of car park, and result in continued use of Hollow Way 	<p>reservations maintained</p>
<p>Long Wittenham Parish Council</p>	<p>No strong views</p>	<p>No strong views</p>
<p>North Moreton Parish Council</p>	<p>No strong views, but the following concerns are raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30mph limit on Sires Hill should be enforced an extended as a priority • Re-routing of traffic may impact on Long Wittenham Road junction to North Moreton 	

3.3i **Representations on original proposal**

Neighbour representations and interested parties, summarised as follows:

<p>Objections - 17 representations received</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased traffic and noise close to dwellings on Hollow Way, and on Sires Hill • Highway safety – dangerous access onto Sires Hill. 30mph speed limit is not adhered to along hazardous rat-run. • Incompatible with road network, and lack of public transport • Threat to wildlife from increased traffic to the site • Poor drainage of track, as Sires Hill currently floods • Visually intrusive from surrounding area and from key local view points – track, and vehicles using track • Idyllic countryside spoilt by air, light and noise pollution • Loss of tranquillity to bridlepaths, cycle routes and by-ways • Permanent, adverse impact on local environment and ancient landscape • Contrary to national policy (protection of AONBs), which resists development, except where there is public benefit • The proposal neither conserves nor enhances the landscape • Track would result in harm to sensitive landscape of the AONB – route is inconsistent with historic land layout, and would be a significant intervention into a nationally important landscape • Track would disturb archaeologically significant landscape • No need for harmful track when a working route exists, which could be upgraded with less impact on landscape • Harm to landscape will cancel out benefits of the scheme • Loss of important agricultural land • Overly large car park for needs of centre • Scale and approach to development is unreasonable and disproportionate for such a sensitive area • Intensification of site – buildings, staff levels, visitors, and risk of commercial expansion in the future • Car park charge would dissuade use of proposed car park • Loss of archaeological heritage • Security issues, specifically opening times for access gate
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location of gas pipeline would prevent sinking of track and proposed mitigation • Noise disturbance form amphitheatre - not necessary • Loss of garage on neighbouring site • It would set a precedent for development in the AONB
No strong views – 1 representation received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the principle is acceptable, further revision to the public right of way is required to connect to the highway
Support - 15 representations received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better management of traffic, and improved access • Opportunity for Trust to develop revenue stream to ensure future funding and viability • Allows the Trust to continue to maintain the land for others to enjoy and learn about the natural environment • Exciting prospect, allowing local families to benefit from the excellent offerings from this organisation • Wonderful educational resource for children • Developed through local consultation • The addition of more parking and a farm shop is welcomed • The existing car parking, dangerous road and lack of facilities serve as a barrier to people visiting the area, and degradation of Hollow Way • The development would enhance the environment and allow people to experience the AONB • It is not about attracting new visitors, it is responding to existing demand. • Impact associated with the track will be temporary, until the vegetation matures. • The conservation of the high grade landscape and habitats is to the benefit of us all. This expansion, while having some impacts that have been minimised as much as possible, will aid the amount and level of care that the Earth Trust is able to provide. • Community benefits
Additional general comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The application should be considered by committee • Sensitive approach needed to manage noise and lighting associated with amphitheatre, and across the site • The provision of the new track must be ensured and the other aspects should not proceed without it, to alleviate pressure on restricted access along village roads • A safer approach is needed to manage heavier levels of traffic on event days • Compromise is required to manage expansion of surrounding towns and villages, while making available learning opportunities in the natural environment • We are fortunate to live in an area of such beauty and under the management of this charity, for all our benefits

3.3ii **Representations on amended plans / further information:**

Neighbour representations and interested parties, summarised as follows:

<p>Objections - 3 representations received</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other less invasive options not explored, eg. Effective management of existing car park and cafe • The organisation's aims could be achieved on a smaller scale without harm to the AONB • Insufficient information on management / security of new car park / parking fees • Impact on scheduled monuments • Environmental / noise impact if open 24/7 • Lack of mitigation relating to amphitheatre noise • Increased light pollution • Security / car park access • Charging for parking would result in continued parking allow verges on Hollow Way – the Earth Trust should therefore contribute to maintenance • Further thought should be given to coach parking in connection with local development / growth of the area • Increased congestion to villages from coaches – restrictions should apply • While the buildings at Hill Farm are acceptable, the proposed roadway would damage the very landscape the Earth Trust is committed to preserve and protect. • Hollow Way is the only logical access point to The Clumps and to Hill Farm • The proposal to alter the PROW and encourage cycle use along Sires Hill is inappropriate and dangerous
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4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 [P16/S0948/PEM](#) – Pre-application response provided (02/08/2016)
Proposed improvements to visitor facilities

[P14/S0027/FUL](#) - Approved (11/03/2014)
Erection of building containing sinks and bootwash in the farm yard at Earth Trust.
Replacing a portable cabin on site.

[P12/S2324/FUL](#) - Approved (09/01/2013)
Erection of three plastic-covered polytunnels, adjacent to existing polytunnels. The site is an agricultural holding, currently used for horticultural production.

[P12/S2401/PEM](#) - Pre-application response provided (13/11/2012)
Proposals to enable better management of visitors.

[P12/S1608/A](#) - Approved (12/10/2012)
Information, signposting and mapping of the Earth Trust site, to enhance the visitor experience, highlighting seasonal changes to features, cropping and wildlife and bringing the farm, land use and land management to life.

[Series of applications relating to alterations and improvement of Earth Trust centre and land: 1994-2012]

[P94/W0564](#) - Approved (30/12/1994)
Conversion of farm buildings to offices, Education and Interpretation Centre for Little Wittenham Nature Reserve. Access.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 **National policy and legislation**

- National Planning Policy Framework [with particular reference to paragraph 115]
- National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance
- The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 (as amended in 2015)

5.2 **South Oxfordshire Core Strategy policies**

CS1 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development
CSS1 – The overall strategy
CSEN1 – Landscape (AONB)
CSEN3 – Historic environment
CSM2 – Transport assessments and travel plans
CSR2 – Employment in rural areas
CSR3 – Community facilities and rural transport
CSQ2 – Sustainable Design and construction
CSQ3 – Design
CSG1 – Green infrastructure and biodiversity
CSB1 – Conservation and improvement of biodiversity

5.3 **South Oxfordshire Local Plan policies**

G2 – Protection from adverse development
C4 – Landscape setting
C6 – Biodiversity
C9 – Landscape features
CON11 – Nationally significant archaeological remains (inc. Scheduled Monuments)
CON12 – Archaeological evaluation
EP2 – Noise and vibrations
EP3 – External lighting
EP6 – surface water management
D1 – Design
D2 – Cycle parking
D7 – Accessible buildings
D10 – Waste management
CF2 – Community facilities and services
R8 – Public rights of way
A1 – Agricultural structures and buildings
T1 / T2 – Highway safety, transport and parking

5.4 **Supplementary guidance**

- South Oxfordshire Design Guide
- North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment and Management plan 2014-2019.
- South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment 2003 - The site falls within character area 7: Wessex Downs and Western Vale Fringes.

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The key planning considerations in determining the application are:

- Principle of development
- Visual and landscape impact
- Highways and parking
- Residential amenity
- Scale and design of proposed buildings
- Heritage and archaeological impact
- Additional matters

6.2 Principle of development

The site has an intrinsic landscape sensitivity due to its location within the North Wessex Downs AONB and its visual relationship with Wittenham Clumps, an important visitor location within the AONB, with published viewpoints. One of the hills, Castle Hill is a Scheduled Monument, which adds another layer of historic interest to the area (see section 6.7). The proposal constitutes a major development in a highly sensitive location, with long reaching views in and out of the site.

Paragraph 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework states that:

'Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas and should be given great weight in the National Parks and the Broads.'

Paragraph 116 continues:

'Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
- *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
- *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.'*

This is drawn through to the local Development Plan in policy CSEN1 of the SOCS, and policy G2 of the SOLP. Specialist advice has been sought from the North Wessex Downs AONB Board, and landscape consultants, who have also been actively involved throughout the pre-application process.

The Earth Trust is a local, environmental-focussed, learning organisation; the site as a whole serves to promote health and wellbeing opportunities, and plays a role in the local rural economy. It offers a range of economic, environmental and recreational activities as well as workshops, and provides free access to the Wittenham Clumps, open countryside and the nature reserve. The landholding also includes a working farm, woodland and wetland areas, which are closely integrated with the educational and community opportunities provided by the organisation. Policy CSR3 of the SOCS supports the provision of community facilities and services in rural areas, and policy CSR2 permits development which supports the economy of the rural areas, particularly where tourism is based on the character of the area. The proposed works would continue the aims of the organisation, resulting in community, educational and economic benefits.

The Earth Trust plays a key role in guardianship and management of 500ha of countryside identified as sensitive landscape within the AONB. While the application comprises only the development area, the Earth Trust's management and conservation of the wider area is recognised as significant, in terms of conserving and enhancing the character, qualities and heritage of the North Wessex Downs landscape. The development is closely tied to the aims of the organisation, and is required, in part, to improve the management of visitors to the site. The siting of the centre is closely integrated with conserving and accessing the landscape and

therefore could not be located elsewhere. An options appraisal has been carried out for the location of the proposed track (see section 6.4).

Sufficient supporting information has been provided by the applicant to assess the proposal in terms of its impact on the AONB, and the development is in the public interest and represents benefits to the public. While the contribution that the Earth Trust makes to the local community and appreciation of the AONB is noted, the highly sensitive location of the existing facility and proposed extension, result in the proposed landscape treatment of the scheme being critical to the success of the proposals. While the principle of development in the AONB is acceptable in this particular case, the details of the proposal, and the level of mitigation, are considered in greater detail in section 6.3.

6.3 Visual and landscape impact

A comprehensive assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the development proposals has been carried out (Adams Habermehl Ltd August 2016) within which the effects have been described. The assessment considers all elements of the proposal, including proposed buildings at the centre and farm, enlarged car parking area, introduction of track, public right of way and footpaths and landscaping.

The LVIA is considered to be an accurate assessment of the level of significance of impacts and overall conclusions on landscape and on visual receptors, and has been considered by the North Wessex Downs AONB Board, and landscape consultants acting on behalf of SODC.

Level of visual impact	Impact assessment
The proposal introduces 3 new barns along the west boundary of the development set within the context of existing farm buildings. These would be prominent from views from the west in particular and especially from the footpath 283/6.	The proposed three new buildings are similar in scale to those that exist. The depth of the new buildings is limited so that the ridge heights are kept to a minimum approx. 5.5m above floor level, well below the ridge heights of the largest building on the site.
There will be a new access track extending south to Sires Hill Road which would also be prominent from views from the west in particular and especially from the footpath 283/6, and have a visual impact on Sires Hill residents.	Once mitigation is established the impact of the track would be much reduced. The northern section would be likely to have the most significant impact, particularly from Wittenham Clumps, and there would be impacts on views from upper floors of residences along Sires Hill road, the public footpath (PROW 283/6/10) and the public footpath close to Brightwell Barrow.
The principal impact on landscape fabric would be the loss of 118m of the hedgerow at the entrance to the access track on Sires Hill Road.	This is to be replaced and a considerable additional length of new hedgerow (approx 2km) will be planted.
Formal car park	Formal car park is well screened but there would be views from The Clumps towards the informal car park before the proposed mitigation is mature. The proposed grass grid surfacing will keep impacts to a minimum.
New Learning Centre	The location of this new building means that it is well screened from outside the site.

Round Huts	The Round Huts are to be located to the south east of the main site on their own. Some visibility early on, but could be considered to be an appropriate visual reference to the Historic landscape within the broader historic landscape.
<i>Ref: Anthony Stiff Associates – Landscape assessment: consultation response 16/11/16</i>	

The scheme incorporates a number of measures to mitigate impact on the landscape and visual sensitivity of the area, which have also been informed by advice from landscape specialists.

Element of proposal	Mitigation
Track	Shallow 0.25m bund, and sunken to a depth of 0.25m (Addendum to design and access statement (DAS); appropriate, permeable surface; hedging and tree groups (sensitive to character of landscape) – subject to full landscaping and hardstanding condition
Car park	Formal car park reduced to 80 spaces; overflow / event parking kept informal, screened by vegetation and surface to be wire mesh to allow grass to grow through – subject to maintenance strategy by condition.
Tree planting along track	Hedgerow planting; irregular and well-spaced layout, avoiding a formal avenue of trees, while replicating a more traditional hedgerow of laid shrub planting interspersed with occasional mature trees. (Addendum to DAS) – subject to full landscaping and planting condition
Hedging along Sires Hill	The removal of a section of hedgerow on Sires Hill is to be replaced, introducing new landscape infrastructure in the form of new woodland blocks and hedgerows
Lighting on site, serving car park and amphitheatre	Kept to a minimum – purpose is to guide and keep visitors safe, rather than illumination or flood lighting. Low level bollard down lighters restricted by louvres; low wattage spot lights in amphitheatre; ‘Dark Sky Association fixtures’ – DAS ref 6.88. This approach is welcomed and falls within good lighting standards.
New buildings	The buildings are well placed adjacent to existing structures and are designed to fit comfortably within the site which is well contained by the natural topography and landscaping.

While it is recognised that there will be landscape and visual impact on the surrounding area, and within the AONB, a notable public benefit has been identified in the proposed changes and in the longterm guardianship of the wider area by the Earth Trust. In terms of the level of impact, it is not to the extent that would result in harm to the historic landscape character and special qualities of the AONB. The mitigation proposed as part of the development, has responded to advice from landscape specialists in the form of revised plans, and additional supporting information. As such, the measures would contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the landscape infrastructure, and towards the strategy of repair by reintroducing landscape features appropriate across this area. The proposed development within the AONB conforms to national and local policy, and subject to conditions, would deliver appropriate mitigation.

6.4 Highways and parking

The existing access on Hollow Way is sub-standard in width in being only single track

in the main with minimal passing provision. The Earth Trust has been considering a number of different options to overcome access problems for a number of years. Further to an options appraisal considering other access points and network improvements (see section 5 of the Design and Access Statement), it was concluded that a new access onto Sires Hill would be the most suitable option. The County Highways Officer has with this approach. It is welcomed that with the anticipated 20% increase in vehicle trips, development traffic is being removed from this section of carriageway to a more suitable road in terms of width. This approach is subject to closing up of the main access on Hollow Way (other than for Emergency Vehicles), and for the creation of a new access onto Sires Hill.

The County Highways Officer has advised that although visibility splays for the new access could be achieved within the site, the proposal includes extending the 30mph speed restriction to include the new entrance. With reference to the Transport Statement (ref. 4.1.17), 'through discussions with OCC and Thames Valley Police, it is proposed to extend the existing 30mph speed limit 75 metres eastwards to include the new access track. This will encourage lower speeds on the approach to the new access junction with associated highway safety benefits.'

For any reduction in the speed limit, a consultation will be required to be undertaken. Although a particular outcome cannot be pre-empted, the funds towards consultation and preparing an order have been secured by legal agreement.

The following points were also raised as important Highways considerations:

- The provision of 84 formal parking spaces, 4 disabled spaces and 105 informal spaces is acceptable, subject to suitable management of the parking, particularly on event days.
- Further to receipt of additional information on coach movement on-site and deliveries, the County Highways Officer is satisfied that the small number of coach groups will be able to use the site without highway congestion or harm to the highway network. An Event Management Strategy, and Travel plan, will be required by condition to clarify operational matters.
- Cycle parking, and wash facilities for cyclists are already provided on-site.

6.5 Residential amenity

Policy EP2 of the SOLP sets out that proposals which would adversely affect neighbouring occupants by reason of noise or vibrations would be resisted, unless suitable mitigation can be demonstrated.

There are two small cottages known as Hillside Cottages (55 metres away from the amphitheatre to the east), and a third property situated northwest of the Earth Trust called Wittenham Hill (157 metres from the amphitheatre), which would be vulnerable to any increase in noise. The site is currently used for occasional weddings and private events, and the amphitheatre would be used in connection with the Trust, and not in any way as an independent, more intense use of the site. The Environmental Protection Officer has advised that the impact can be appropriately mitigated through a condition restricting amplified performances in outdoor areas to within the hours of 8am to 10pm only.

The creation of the proposed access would result in traffic noise being transferred from Hollows Way to Sires Hill. Sires Hill is a 2-way rural road, serving a small number of dwellings on Sires Hill, and linking Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Long Wittenham and the North Moreton / Didcot crossroads. The existing route is a single track access (with passing points) along Hollow Way. The applicant's highway data has anticipated an increase of 20% in site development traffic as a consequence of the application. With regard to peak hour traffic, it is acknowledged that this peak does not coincide with the

network peak and therefore, as advised by the County Highways Officer, the site weekday peak vehicles trips for the site, increasing from 72 to 86 (two-way) is considered to be acceptable. Although it is acknowledged there would be a displacement of traffic to Sires Hill, the day-to-day level would not affect the residents of Sires Hill in terms of amenity or noise.

6.6 Scale and design of proposed buildings

Development, in terms of new buildings, is limited to the north of the site closest to Hollow Way, and set away from dwellings other than Hillside Cottages. The cottages are currently surrounded on three sides by the Earth Trust site, and the existing structures of the learning barn and offices would remain in place, ie. with no greater impact in terms of amenity, scale or design, but would become the café and refurbished offices.

The proposed skills and learning building would run alongside the cottages, but as it would be no higher than 4m (and less in terms of its ground level height), and would be a single storey, flat roofed building, it would not dominate or adversely affect the amenity of neighbouring occupants. By virtue of the design being set-down, green roofed and not visually intrusive, as well as being located alongside the existing buildings on the site, impact beyond the site has been appropriately minimised.

The round hut learning structures are modest in scale and would be located close to Hollow Way road, rather than extending further into the open areas of the site. Their purpose is closely associated with the heritage of the site and they would be largely screened by vegetation.

The three proposed farm buildings are similar in scale to those that exist. The depth of the buildings is limited so that the ridge heights are kept to a minimum - approximately 5.5m above floor level, well below the ridge heights of the largest building on the site. With reference to one of the buildings being used as a vehicle workshop (DWG PL013 Rev A) the following condition is recommended: Use in connection with farm only; no commercial use.

6.7 Heritage and archaeological impact

The scheduled monuments of Sinodun Hill Camp (or Castle Hill), List no. 1006302 and Brightwell Barrow, List no. 1018722 are located close to Wittenham Clumps, and within reach of the development site. Advice has been sought from Historic England, and the applicant has submitted a scheduled monuments impact assessment. Comments from Historic England will be updated verbally at the committee meeting.

The proposed site lies within an area of some considerable archaeological potential located at the foot of the Iron Age Hillfort of Sinodun Hill Camp (SAM OX208). The application site has been the subject of numerous archaeological investigations which have recorded a landscape rich with surviving archaeological deposits relating to the Iron Age and Roman period. The Archaeological Officer has advised that if Members are minded to approve the application, the following conditions should be added: Written Scheme of Investigation, and a staged programme of archaeological evaluation and mitigation.

6.8 **Additional matters**

6.8i **Impact on trees and biodiversity**

The proposal requires the loss of 2 significant Walnut trees and a Red Horse Chestnut, however their loss will have limited impact on the wider surrounding landscape and the proposed amount of new planting will more than mitigate for their loss. No objection has been raised by the Forestry Officer, subject to conditions: tree protection, tree pit and species details and detailed landscaping plan.

The Ecology Officer has highlighted that the proposals have involved extensive pre-application discussions and have been designed to work with and enhance the ecological value of the site. The proposed works will not have any significant ecological impacts which cannot be mitigated to provide enhancements in the longer term – conditions recommended for each phase (see section 8.1).

6.8ii **Drainage and flooding**

While the site is not within a flood zone, ground investigation has revealed very poor soakage on site, and the site drops away notably towards Sires Hill. The scheme incorporates a number of sustainable drainage approaches to minimise intrusion into the landscape and to mitigate the impact of the buildings, parking area and track on the surrounding area – permeable parking areas, swale adjacent to track, track design and storage pond. The proposal has been considered by the council's drainage consultant and OCC Transport Planners, who have advised the drainage elements can be effectively managed by condition.

6.8iii **Environmental Impact**

The site is located within an AONB, which is classed as a sensitive area in terms of screening for environmental impact. A screening opinion was issued on 22 May 2015 for the same scheme (other than detail), concluding that the development would not result in significant environmental impact or require an environmental impact assessment.

6.8iv **Public rights of Way**

The application affects one public right of way (PROW)(Little Wittenham Footpath 6) which currently passes through the site and gives access to the open access of Wittenham Clumps and surrounds. The site is also in close proximity to Didcot and offers significant opportunities to increase walking and cycling access to the site.

The Public Rights of Way Team have advised that the footway/PROW route and diversion referred to in the application is welcomed. The diverted routes will continue to connect with Hollow Way using the same access gate as existing. However, the details associated with the changes will need to be formalised through liaison with the PROW Team, and by applying for a Public Path Diversion Order. As such, conditions should be worded to allow for alterations in the detailing, in order that the PROW standards can be met, while continuing to conform to the approved scheme.

6.8v **Early planting along track**

It is noted that the Landscape advice recommends early implementation of mitigation planting to minimise the period of the track being without screening. While this approach is encouraged, it is acknowledged that disturbance to the ground will be an inevitable part of creating the track, and setting the planting period at too early a stage could be counterproductive in the long run. On this basis, a condition has not been added to secure this point.

6.9vi **Off-site repair of Hollow Way**

It is noted that the AONB board have strongly encouraged off-site, repair of Hollow Way. While it is recognised that visitors to the Earth Trust make use of Hollow Way, the development itself would not justify repair of Hollow Way, use of Hollow Way is not solely by visitors to the Earth Trust, and the relocation of the access will reduce future use of the access road. The Earth Trust has expressed an interest in being part of a partnership approach to address the matter, but it would not be reasonable to require the Trust to carry out improvements to Hollow Way directly in connection with the proposal before Members.

7.0 **CONCLUSION**

7.1 Your officers recommend that planning permission is granted because the proposed development is considered to be acceptable for the following reasons:

7.1ii By virtue of the public and community benefits provided by the development, the principle accords with national policy in respect of a major development in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The level of mitigation designed into the scheme safeguards the sensitive landscape, and aids in integrating the buildings, track and parking area into the existing landscape.

The scheme does not present planning issues with respect to ecological and environmental protection, amenity, heritage and archaeological impact.

The granting of permission is subject to the prior conclusion of a s106 Agreement to secure a travel plan monitoring fee and highway safety consultation fee, and a s278 agreement to secure highway alterations to access points

Subject to conditions tied to the three phases, the proposal accords with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and National Planning Practice Guidance (2014), South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (2012), South Oxfordshire Local Plan (Saved policies, 2011) and the South Oxfordshire Design Guide (2016).

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 **Recommendation A:**

To grant full planning permission for a three phase development to improve the facilities, access and parking at the Earth Trust Centre, subject to the prior conclusion of a s106 Agreement to secure a travel plan monitoring fee and highway safety consultation fee, and a s278 agreement to secure highway alterations to access points, and subject to conditions tied to the three phases (see section 8.3).

AND

8.2 **Recommendation B:**

In the event that both the s106 and s178 are not signed by 28 April 2017, delegated authority be given to the Head of Development Management to refuse planning permission, or if drawing up of the agreements is ongoing, to agree a reasonable extension of time for the s106 and s278 to be signed.

8.3 **Conditions**

Phase 1: Learning facilities, roundhouse education area and farm barns

- 1. Work to commence within three years.**
- 2. In accordance with approved plans.**
- 3. In accordance with construction traffic management plan, as amended by supporting information received 13/12/16.**

4. Tree species and tree pit details (Phase 1 - centre).
5. Details of hard landscape and planting proposals.
6. Ten year landscape and ecological management plan (Phase 1 - centre).
7. Tree protection (detailed).
8. Ecology survey and mitigation.
9. Archaeological written scheme of investigation (for whole development area).
10. Programme of archaeological evaluation and mitigation (for whole development area).
11. Travel plan statement.
12. Details of foul water drainage.
13. Details of surface water drainage.
14. Schedule of materials (Phase 1 - centre).

Phase 2: Access, track and parking; open air amphitheatre; and farm barn

1. In accordance with approved plans.
2. In accordance with construction traffic management plan, as amended by supporting information received 13/12/16.
3. Tree species and tree pit details (Phase 2 - track and parking area).
4. Details of hard landscape and planting proposals, and implementation.
5. Ten year landscape and ecological management plan, including parking area (Phase 2 - track and parking area).
6. Tree protection (detailed).
7. Updated ecology survey and mitigation.
8. Access on Sires Hill in accordance with design and access statement - Appendix A, unless modified in agreement with the Highways Authority.
9. Details of gate on Sires Hill, set back from highway.
10. Updated travel plan statement.
11. Event management strategy.
12. Prior to first public use of track, implementation of turning, parking and coach drop-off.
13. Closing up of vehicular access onto Hollow Way (except for emergency vehicles), within six months of first public use of track.
14. Bike shelters / cycle parking.
15. Sustainable drainage scheme (for whole development area).
16. Schedule of materials (Phase 2 - track and parking area).
17. No amplified performances outdoors between 10pm and 8am (next day).
18. Vehicle workshop (farm) – use in connection with farm only; no commercial use.

Phase 3: On-site cafe

1. In accordance with approved plans.
2. Updated construction traffic management plan.
3. Tree Protection (detailed).
4. Updated ecology survey and mitigation.
5. Details of foul water drainage.
6. Details of surface water drainage.
7. Schedule of materials (Phase 3 - cafe).
8. Operational hours of café and farm shop only in conjunction with opening hours of centre and associated offices.

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