

18 December 2020

Our ref: RFI 5327



Ms Louise Cole

request-707550-729cee71@whatdotheyknow.com

Mail Hub
Worcester County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Dear Ms Cole

Access to information request – Request No RFI 5327

Thank you for your request(s) for information which we received on 20 November 2020. Your request has been carefully considered under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 ("the EIRs").

You asked for:-

In February 2017 you consulted on site LEB3, originally known as Aiskew Moor, or Alt/B004/033 in Leeming Bar for the Hambleton District Council Local Plan.

1) Could I please have a copy of any communications, comments or reports which you shared with Hambleton District Council about this site at any time during the Local Plan development?

We have routinely searched all our electronic systems for the information we hold in scope of your request above and is provided in the attached zip file.

Specifically, in the email dated 16 February 2017 we responded to a query regarding several Leeming Bar sites. On this occasion we advised that site Aiskew Moor (ALT/B/004/032/E) had a BMV provisional grade of 2 and site Aiskew Grange Farm (ALT/B/004/033/E) had a provisional grade of 3. These comments can be found on the spreadsheet titled '*NE comments Leeming_Bar_Sites & 2_New_Alt_Sites*'.

The email dated 22 May 2019 contains a spreadsheet titled '*RE Hambleton Local Plan Outstanding Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Site Assessment (1)*', lines 27, 33, 50 and 51 refer to reference ALT/B/004/033 (a/b). However, this communication was to answer the specific questions found on the spreadsheet, NE were not questioned about soils on this occasion.

2) Could you also confirm that you were aware that this site comprised 30ha of Grade 2 arable land? Would the loss of such land cause you concern?

Please refer to the spreadsheets for specific details. Natural England advice on best and most versatile land is always included in our plan responses. For example, see our response letter to Hambleton District Council dated 19 February 2016 - Our Reference 175989 (pdf document titled – '*RE Hambleton District Council letters*').

Specifically, please see our communication dated 16 February 2017. Advice on best and most versatile land is always included in our plan responses for example see the response dated 19 February 2016 reference 175989. We also provided general advice on soils in our response to the Local Plan HRA and SA (response dated 20 January 2017).

3) Can you confirm whether you enquired as to the availability of alternative sites of poorer quality and if so what was Hambleton District Council's reply?

4) If you did not enquire as to alternative sites why not?

Natural England highlighted the requirement of Hambleton Council to consider the loss of Best and Most Versatile Soils when allocating sites to be brought forward for development in our local plan responses. It is the responsible of Hambleton as the local authority to weigh up the loss of Best and Most Versatile soils against the benefits of sites when deciding which sites to allocate. As a result, Natural England does not enquire specifically into the loss of soils on a site by site basis.

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If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. As you may be aware, under the legislation should you have any concerns with the service you have received in relation to your requests and wish to make complaint or request a review of our decision, please contact me and I'll arrange for a colleague to conduct an internal review. Under Regulation 11(2) this needs to be done no later than 40 working days after the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of that complaint or the internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the internal review procedure provided by Natural England. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: <https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/> or call on 0303 123 1113 (local rate), www.ico.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Kate Donovan, Adviser
Access to Information
Legal & Governance Team

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