

APP/18/00943 | Change of Use of land and woodland (retrospective) as a wedding venue, including retention of permanent ancillary buildings and structures, the erection of temporary structures (including marquees and temporary facilities) and the use of land as a campsite in association with events, and use of existing cottage for visitor accommodation. | Tournerbury Woods, Tournerbury Lane, Hayling Island 18.2268

Thank you for consulting me on this application. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

The application is accompanied by an Updated Phase 1 Habitat Survey (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, September 2018). The proposal is for the formalisation of facilities for a wedding venue, including the retention of a marquee and other temporary structures, and use of land as a campsite. It is worth noting that none of these structures and facilities has been subject to previous ecological assessment in relation to planning and this is therefore the first opportunity for the existing layout to be scrutinised in a planning context (the previous application in 2017 was for access improvements only).

The submitted ecology report, as it is essentially retro-fitted to an existing development, does not address the issue of the SPA or its supporting habitat (the application site is actually within Chichester & Langstone Harbours SPA, as well as Chichester Harbour SSSI) and therefore has not investigated the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS). Land immediately adjacent to the application site features in the SWBGS: Site H39 and H40D are immediately east. I would suggest that recreational disturbance issues associated with the wedding venue are assessed – would recreational pressure increase as a result of the application? Is the SPA and its supporting habitat accessible, and accessed, by venue guests? Is this likely to be an issue during the overwintering period? Is there an issue with noise and general disturbance from visitors and vehicles? It may not be an issue at all, but it needs to be addressed. In summary, the application needs to be accompanied by a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) so that impacts on the SPA can be understood.

In terms of on-site ecological constraints, the venue facilities and associated infrastructure have been constructed without, it would appear, any ecological assessment having been carried out. It is therefore not possible to objectively assess the ecological impacts associated with these works, both to the woodland and the more open habitats. Presumably the woodland, being ancient, is of some importance for various protected and notable species such as roosting bats, birds and invertebrates.

On a technical note, the ecology report states that ‘cudweed’ was recorded on site. The scientific name provided for this plant is that of the nationally-rare Jersey cudweed and I would query whether this is correct. I would also note that no Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre data has been obtained: HBIC provides the most up-to-date and accurate data for habitats and species and should form the basis for any ecological assessment. A lack of HBIC data is likely to result in useful information being missed: for example, HBIC holds records of rare bird species within Tournerbury Woods, such as lesser spotted woodpecker.

The ecology report provides a lengthy discussion on the merits of the woodland, its value in the context of Hampshire, and whether it should be included within the SSSI boundaries (and does not mention that it is also within the SPA boundaries). Irrespective of whether the woodland is of county importance (it is ancient woodland and therefore is of county importance) it is within the SSSI and SPA and provides valuable supporting habitat. Any works within the SSSI and SPA require explicit consent from Natural England.

NPPF, Circular 06/2005 and Natural England Standing Advice on Protected Species, require that planning decisions are based on full, up-to-date ecological information and it is essential that all necessary survey, assessment and mitigation information is available to the LPA prior to determination, particularly in the case of protected species, which are a material planning consideration. This will enable the LPA to determine the application on the basis of full knowledge about the ecological impacts of the proposal and to ensure that any impacts can and will be mitigated, and are acceptable.

If you have any queries please don't hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Tristan

Tristan Norton

**Senior Ecologist
Ecology Team**