

Land at Mandai, St Peter's Road, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 0RT

Ecological Assessment of Impacts on Brent Geese Report

January 2018

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Ecological Assessment of Impacts on Brent Geese Report
Land at Mandai, St Peter's Road, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 0RT
for
The Town Planning Experts

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This report represents sound industry practice; reports and recommends correctly, truthfully and objectively; is appropriate given the local site conditions; scope of works proposed and resources allocated to us by the client; and avoids invalid, biased, and exaggerated statements.

The author disclaims any responsibility to the client and others in respect of any matters outside the scope of the above. This report is confidential to the client and the author accepts no responsibility of whatsoever nature to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, is made known. Any such party relies on the report at their own risk.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides information from an ecological assessment of the impacts on Brent Geese and other overwintering birds carried out by Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd for The Town Planning Experts in connection with a proposal to use the site as a touring caravan site with alteration of access on land at Mandai, St Peter's Road, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 0RT (approximate Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SU731027). The site location is shown in *Figures 1 and 2*; and a site plan is given in *Figure 3* (see *Section 6*).
2. This report has been produced to address the ecological concerns raised by the Hampshire County Ecologist regarding the planning application (ref: APP/17/00942) submitted to Havant Borough Council.
3. A site walkover was carried out during the daytime on the 16th January 2018 by Victoria Russell MCIEEM, Carmen Green BSc (Hons) GradCIEEM and Chloe Mockridge BSc (Hons).
4. The Solent is an important coastal zone in the UK for a variety of wading birds as well as Brent Geese and consequently receives protection under European legislation. Within the Solent, there are three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) that are additionally designated as Ramsar sites and recognised internationally due to their importance for wintering waterbird assemblages. The Solent is known to support approximately 150,000 wintering birds every year and this includes approximately 10-13% of the world population and 30% of the UK population of Brent Geese. Traditionally wintering on coastal mudflats, Brent Geese also rely upon managed fields inland including farmland and amenity grassland, particularly during high tide.
5. The site consists of a garden with a caravan and four small sheds. It was formerly part of the garden of the adjacent property, Mandai, to the north of the site. Access is via a gravel track from St Peter's road. This continues along the southern boundary of the site. There are areas of hardstanding and decking at the eastern end; a small patch of rough grassland in the centre of the site; a short mown lawn at the western end; and several patches of artificial turf throughout. There is fencing and hedges or tree-lines along all site boundaries as well as a hedge across the centre of the site.
6. There are seven statutory designated sites within 2km of the site. These are listed in *Table 4.1.1.1* and include the Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar sites (recognised internationally due to their importance for wintering waterbird assemblages). None of these will be directly affected by this small-scale development.
7. As the site is unsuitable habitat for Brent Geese and therefore unlikely to be used for foraging, the main potential effects of the development would be through disturbance. The adjacent field has previously supported up to 900 Brent Geese and is therefore treated as supporting habitat for the nearby coastal SPA and Ramsar sites. Although Brent Geese can be sensitive to disturbance, continuous general pattern disturbance has little effect on this species; instead, it is short periods

of noise or activity that negatively impacts them. There is currently a caravan on site and as the proposals only involve the addition of two more caravan plots with all management activities to be carried out by the property owner at intervals during the summer or autumn, there should be minimal impact on Brent Geese and other overwintering birds using the adjacent arable field. Also, the majority of the activity on the site is likely to be during the summer months. In addition, the site is screened from this field and the adjacent property) on all boundaries by fencing and hedges or tree-lines.

8. A total of eight Brent Geese were observed foraging in the grassland field across the road c.15m to the east of the site. However, there are two road hedges that separate the site from this field) which provide good screening. A large flock of Brent Geese were observed foraging in a grassland field c.1,400m to the north-west of the site. At least 300 individuals were recorded feeding in this field and additional birds were seen flying in from further north-east. Some of these birds were previously observed using the intertidal habitat on the opposite side of the road (to the north) to this. In addition, a small flock of Oystercatchers (Amber list) and a single Curlew (Red list and UK BAP species) were observed utilising the intertidal habitat (c.1,540m to the north-east of the site).
9. To improve the screening on site (and further reduce the potential effects of disturbance on Brent Geese potentially foraging on the arable land) the lower fence panels will be replaced with panels of at least 1.8m along the boundaries separating the site from the suitable Brent Goose habitat and therefore minimising any potential light and visual disturbance. These fence panels should be installed at the earliest opportunity and prior to works commencing. The existing tall fence panels will remain and be maintained.
10. Where possible, to minimise disturbance on this species due to noise and lighting, if any major works need to be carried out on the site, they should be timed to avoid the core winter period (October to March inclusive).
11. To allow the site to be cleared for development without harm to nesting birds (so as to comply with the law – the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended)), any affected vegetation with the potential to support nesting birds should be cut to near ground level (approximately 30cm) outside the bird breeding season (which is late February to August inclusive). Similarly, any structures must be demolished outside the bird breeding season.
12. Suitable foraging and hibernating habitat for widespread reptile species is present on site. However, as the foraging habitat is very small area and the owner of the site regularly strims/ cuts it in the summer it is unlikely to support a viable population of reptiles. The suitable hibernation habitat will be unaffected. In addition, the surrounding habitat is mostly arable land, which is unsuitable for reptiles. Therefore, it is unlikely that they are present on site. However, as a precautionary approach, it is recommended that the removal of the rough grassland (and the pile of rubble in the north-west corner of the site if necessary) is undertaken carefully by hand and ideally supervised by an ecologist. If any reptiles are found, they will be captured and

translocated to a receptor site at the base of the hedges/ tree-lines by trained personnel. This should be carried out during the reptile active season (March-September).

13. If more than 12 months elapses after completion of the survey, it may be advisable to conduct further survey work to obtain up-to-date information prior to commencement of works to ensure protected species compliance.

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Purpose of this report

This report provides information from an ecological assessment of the impacts on Brent Goose and other overwintering birds carried out by Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd for The Town Planning Experts in connection with a proposal to use the site as a touring caravan site with alteration to the access on land at Mandai, St Peter's Road, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 0RT (approximate Ordnance Survey Grid Reference SU731027).

This report has been produced to address the ecological concerns raised by the Hampshire County Ecologist regarding the planning application (ref: APP/17/00942) submitted to Havant Borough Council, which states:

“The proposal is small-scale but is situated within a larger field that features in the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) as Site H60P. The site is classified as a Primary Support Area and has supported up to 900 dark-bellied brent geese. Whilst not within the boundaries of any designated site, fields supporting brent geese and certain other overwintering bird species are treated as supporting habitat for the nearby coastal Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites, and therefore impacts to such supporting habitat are viewed as analogous to impacts to the designated sites themselves.”

‘In this case, I would raise the potential for disturbance impacts to overwintering SPA/Ramsar bird species. I appreciate that the site as exists is somewhat screened from the surrounding arable farmland (some photographs would be most useful), however, any new proposals may result in activity that could result in novel disturbance to birds.’

‘I would request that the applicant provides a statement on the potential impacts of the proposed development on SPA/Ramsar supporting habitat. This should include use of data from the SWBGS and, where necessary, provide details of any existing or proposed mitigating measures to avoid disturbance impacts.’

2.2 Site description

The site consists of a garden with a caravan and four small sheds. It was formerly part of the garden of the adjacent property, Mandai, to the north of the site. Access is via a gravel track from St Peter's road. This continues along the southern boundary of the site. There are areas of hardstanding and decking at the eastern end; a small patch of rough grassland in the centre of the site; a short mown lawn at the western end; and several patches of artificial turf throughout. There is fencing and hedges or tree-lines along all site boundaries as well as a hedge across the centre of the site.

The site lies on the western side of St Peter's road, to the south of the village of Northney and to the north of Hayling Island. The immediate surroundings consist of residential housing to the north and agricultural land to the east, south and west. In the wider landscape, there are extensive areas of arable fields and grazed pasture in all directions; the Emsworth Channel within Chichester Harbour,

is c.540m to the east; the urban area of Hayling Island extends to the south; and the main A3023 road is to the west.

The location of the site is shown on aerial photographs and an Ordnance Survey map in *Figures 1* and *2* in *Section 6*.

2.3 *Proposed activities*

This survey was carried out in connection with a proposal to station three caravans plots on the site with alterations to the access.

2.4 *Current planning status*

Planning permission is being applied for.

2.5 *Objectives of survey and report*

The ecological walkover completed by Hampshire Ecological Services Ltd and this report aim to carry out the following:

- an assessment of the current overwintering bird potential, including use of data from the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS);
- an evaluation of the potential impacts of the proposals (if any) on the SPA/Ramsar supporting habitat; and
- provide details of any existing or proposed mitigating measures to avoid disturbance impacts.

2.6 *Legal context*

2.6.1 *General*

All species of bird are protected under *Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). The protection was extended by the CRow Act.

The legislation makes it an offence to intentionally:

- kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built; or
- take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

2.6.2 *Brent Geese*

The Solent is an important coastal zone in the UK for a variety of wading birds as well as Brent Geese and consequently receives protection under European legislation. Within the Solent, there are three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) that are additionally designated as Ramsar sites and recognised internationally due to their importance for wintering waterbird assemblages. These are:

- Solent & Southampton Water;
- Portsmouth Harbour; and
- Chichester & Langstone Harbours.

The Solent is known to support approximately 150,000 wintering birds every year and this includes approximately 10-13% of the world population and 30% of the UK population of Brent Geese. Traditionally wintering on coastal mudflats, Brent Geese also rely upon managed fields inland including farmland and amenity grassland, particularly during high tide (King, 2010).

2.6.3 *Birds of Conservation Concern*

In addition to statutory protection, some bird species are classified according to their conservation status, such as their inclusion on the red and amber lists of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) in the UK (Eaton *et al.* 2009).

Red list (high conservation concern) species are those that are Globally Threatened according to IUCN criteria; those whose population has declined rapidly (50% or more) in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown a substantial recent recovery.

Amber list (medium conservation concern) species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately (between 25% and 49%) in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

Green list (low conservation concern) species fulfil none of the above criteria.

In addition, certain species have also been identified as Priority Species (UK BAP species) as part of the UK's post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.

2.7 **Structure of this report**

This report is structured as follows:

- *Section 1* contains the executive summary;
- *Section 2* contains an introduction;
- *Section 3* describes the survey methods;
- *Section 4* describes the results;
- *Section 5* evaluates the findings;
- *Section 6* contains the figures including:
 - *Figure 1* gives aerial photographs showing the site location;
 - *Figure 2* gives an Ordnance Survey map showing the location of the site;
 - *Figure 3* gives a site plan;
 - *Figure 4* gives the locations of important sites for Brent Geese and waders around Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar; and
 - *Figure 5* gives the locations of Brent Geese and other overwintering birds observed within 2km of the site.
- *Section 7* gives photographs of the site; and
- *Section 8* lists the references.

3 **METHODS**

3.1 **Desk study**

The *Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside* website (www.magic.gov.uk) was used to search for designated sites on or adjacent to the site including Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites. The search area was 5km for SACs and SPAs sites and 2km for LNRs, NNRs, Ramsar sites and SSSIs, as specified in Hampshire's *Biodiversity Checklist*.

A data search from the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) has not been commissioned in relation to this site.

3.2 **Field survey**

3.2.1 *Date(s), times and weather*

A site walkover was carried out during the daytime on the 16th January 2018. The weather was cold (5°C) and dry with 30% cloud cover and a fresh breeze (Beaufort scale 5).

3.2.2 *Personnel*

The survey was carried out by Victoria Russell MCIEEM who is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). She has over 20 years of experience in ecological consultancy and is a highly competent ecologist trained in Phase 1 Habitat Survey and protected species surveys. She was assisted by Carmen Green BSc (Hons) GradCIEEM and Chloe Mockridge BSc (Hons).

Carmen is a volunteer for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and has undertaken the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) of a site biannually for the past four years.

All staff adhere to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) *Code of Professional Conduct*.

3.2.3 *Site walkover*

A walkover survey of the site was carried out to assess the habitats present and determine the likelihood of disturbance from the proposals on any Brent Geese or other overwintering birds and waders potentially using the SPA and Ramsar supporting habitats on adjacent land. Initial surveys do not usually confirm species presence or absence, but habitat suitability and incidental sightings would have been noted had they been encountered.

Other habitat in the surrounding area (within 1-2km of the site) was also scanned from the roadside, checking for the presence and suitability for Brent Geese and other overwintering birds and waders. Birds in flight were also recorded.

Where overwintering birds were encountered, the number of birds in the flocks were counted following the standard core count methodology, as used during Wetland Bird Surveys (WeBS) for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) (Bibby *et al.* 2000) and Brent Goose surveys (King, 2010). Where birds occur in large flocks, the number of individuals was estimated by mentally splitting the birds into smaller groups and counting the number of groups present within the flock.

4

RESULTS

4.1 Desk study

4.1.1 Designated sites

According to the *Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside* website (www.magic.gov.uk), there are seven statutory designated sites within 2km of the site. These are listed in *Table 4.1.1.1* and include the Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar sites.

Table 4.1.1.1. Statutory designated sites within 2km of the site.

Level of designation	Designation	Name	Distance & direction from site
International	SPA	Chichester and Langstone Harbours	c.540-1,420m north, east and west
	Ramsar	Chichester and Langstone Harbours	c.540-1,420m north, east and west
	SAC	Solent Maritime	c.540-1,420m north, east and west
National	SSSI	Chichester Harbour	c.540-1,420m north, east and west
	NNR	-	-
County	LNR	Gutner Point	c.880m south-east
		West Hayling	c.1,435m west
		Hayling Billy	c.1,895m north-west

4.1.2 Brent Geese

During the winter months, the Solent is known to support approximately 150,000 wintering birds every year and this includes approximately 10-13% of the world population and 30% of the UK population of Brent Geese. Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar sites represent approximately 13% of the national population and 6.5% of the international population of Brent Geese (King, 2010). According to the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy, the land immediately to the south of the site is classified as a Primary Support Area (site H60P) and has previously supported up to 900 Brent Geese (see *Figure 4* in *Section 6*). Therefore, it is treated as supporting habitat for the nearby coastal SPA and Ramsar sites.

In addition, Brent Geese are on the Amber list of Birds of Conservation Concern and are a UK BAP species.

4.2 ***Ecological assessment for Brent Geese***

4.2.1 *On site*

The site is unsuitable for Brent Geese as they favour large, open sites with short grass for grazing and clear sight-lines. In addition, at the time of the survey, no Brent Geese were recorded on site or in the arable field to the south. However, a small flock of Brent Geese were observed flying over the site at the start of the survey.

There is fencing and hedges or tree-lines along all site boundaries, providing screening between the site and the adjacent arable field (which is supporting habitat for the nearby coastal SPA and Ramsar sites).

4.2.2 *The surrounding area*

Suitable habitat in the surrounding area (within 1-2km of the site) was checked for the presence of Brent Geese and other overwintering birds and waders where it was visible from the roadside. A total of eight Brent Geese were observed foraging in the grassland field across the road c.15m to the east of the site. However, there are two road hedges that separate the site from this field (see *Photo 11* in *Section 7*) which provide good screening.

A large flock of Brent Geese were observed foraging in a grassland field c.1,400m to the north-west of the site. At least 300 individuals were recorded feeding in this field and additional birds were seen flying in from further north-east. Some of these birds were previously observed using the intertidal habitat on the opposite side of the road (to the north) to this field.

In addition, a small flock of Oystercatchers (Amber list) and a single Curlew (Red list and UK BAP species) were observed utilising the same intertidal habitat (c.1,540m to the north-east of the site).

The locations of the Brent Geese and wader sightings are shown in *Figure 5* in *Section 6*.

4.3 ***Other ecological constraints***

4.3.1 *Birds*

All the trees, bushes and structures on the site have the potential to support nesting birds during the breeding season. Although no Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) were recorded on site during this survey, it is likely that several BoCC such as House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*) will use this site for nesting and foraging.

4.3.2 *Widespread species of reptiles*

There is a small of rough grassland at the centre of the site provides suitable foraging habitat for widespread species of reptiles such as slow-worms. In addition, the pile of rubble in the north-west corner of the site provides suitable hibernation habitat for reptiles (see *Photos 7 & 8* in *Section 7*). However, it is not affected by the current proposals.

5 **INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION**

5.1 **Constraints on survey**

No survey constraints were noted. Birds can be highly mobile and may utilise a site at any time; therefore, it possible that any overwintering birds using the surrounding habitats could have been missed at the time of survey. The movement of Brent Geese and wading birds between coastal and inland sites is dependent on a range of factors including time of day, tidal water movements, weather conditions and the availability of suitable inland sites.

5.2 **Survey report expiry**

If more than 12 months elapses after completion of the survey, it may be advisable to conduct further survey work to obtain up-to-date information prior to commencement of works to ensure protected species compliance.

5.3 **Potential impacts of proposed development on Brent Geese**

As the site is unsuitable habitat for Brent Geese and therefore unlikely to be used for foraging, the main potential effects of the development would be through disturbance. The adjacent field has previously supported up to 900 Brent Geese and is therefore treated as supporting habitat for the nearby coastal SPA and Ramsar sites. Although Brent Geese can be sensitive to disturbance, continuous general pattern disturbance has little effect on this species; instead, it is short periods of noise or activity that negatively impacts them. There is a currently a caravan on site and as the proposals only involve the addition of two more caravan plots with all management activities to be carried out by the property owner at intervals during the summer or autumn, there should be minimal impact on Brent Geese and other overwintering birds using the adjacent arable field. Also, the majority of the activity on the site is likely to be during the summer months.

In addition, the site is screened from this field (and the adjacent property) on all boundaries by fencing and hedges or tree-lines.

5.4 **Other ecological constraints**

5.4.1 **Designated sites**

According to the *Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside* website (www.magic.gov.uk), there are seven statutory designated sites within 2km of the site. These are listed in *Table 4.1.1.1* and include Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar sites. None of these will be directly affected by this small-scale development.

Potential indirect impacts *i.e.* disturbance to overwintering birds such as Brent Geese is covered in *Section 5.3* above.

5.4.2 *Birds*

All trees, bushes and structures on site could be used by nesting birds. Any affected vegetation with the potential to support nesting birds should be cut to near ground level (approximately 30cm) outside the bird breeding season (which is late February to August inclusive). Similarly, any structures must be demolished outside the bird breeding season. The destruction of active bird nests is prohibited under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended). If this is not possible, and vegetation has to be removed during the nesting season, then it should be inspected (by an ecologist) for nests immediately prior to removal of the vegetation. If there are active nests then they should be retained and work must be delayed until the young have fledged and left the nest.

If any active nests are found during works, a 5m buffer zone should be established around them and temporarily fenced off to prevent plant or personnel disturbing the nest until the end of the breeding bird season (or until the nest is no longer in use).

It is anticipated that all boundary hedges and tree-lines will remain.

5.4.3 *Widespread species of reptiles*

Suitable foraging and hibernating habitat for widespread reptile species is present on site. However, as the foraging habitat is very small area and the owner of the site regularly strims/ cuts it in the summer it is unlikely to support a viable population of reptiles. The suitable hibernation habitat will be unaffected. In addition, the surrounding habitat is mostly arable land, which is unsuitable for reptiles. Therefore, it is unlikely that they are present on site. However, as a precautionary approach, it is recommended that the removal of the rough grassland (and the pile of rubble in the north-west corner of the site if necessary) is undertaken carefully by hand and ideally supervised by an ecologist. If any reptiles are found, they will be captured and translocated to a receptor site at the base of the hedges/ tree-lines by trained personnel. This should be carried out during the reptile active season (March-September).

5.5 *Further survey*

No further surveys are currently proposed.

5.6 *Outline mitigation & enhancement measures*

5.6.1 *General*

To allow the site to be cleared for development without harm to nesting birds (so as to comply with the law – the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended)), any affected vegetation with the potential to support nesting birds should be cut to near ground level (approximately 30cm) outside the bird breeding season (which is late February to August inclusive). Similarly, any structures must be demolished outside the bird breeding season.

5.6.2 *Brent Geese*

To improve the screening on site (and further reduce the potential effects of disturbance on Brent Geese potentially foraging on the arable land) the lower fence panels will be replaced with panels of at least 1.8m along the boundaries separating the site from the suitable Brent Goose habitat and therefore minimising any potential light and visual disturbance. These fence panels should be installed at the earliest opportunity and prior to works commencing. The existing tall fence panels will remain and be maintained.

Where possible, to minimise disturbance on this species due to noise and lighting, if any major works need to be carried out on the site, they should be timed to avoid the core winter period (October to March inclusive).

Figure 1. Aerial photographs showing the location of the site.



Figure 2. Ordnance Survey map showing the location of the site (as indicated by red arrow).



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Figure 3. Plan showing the site boundary outlined in red.

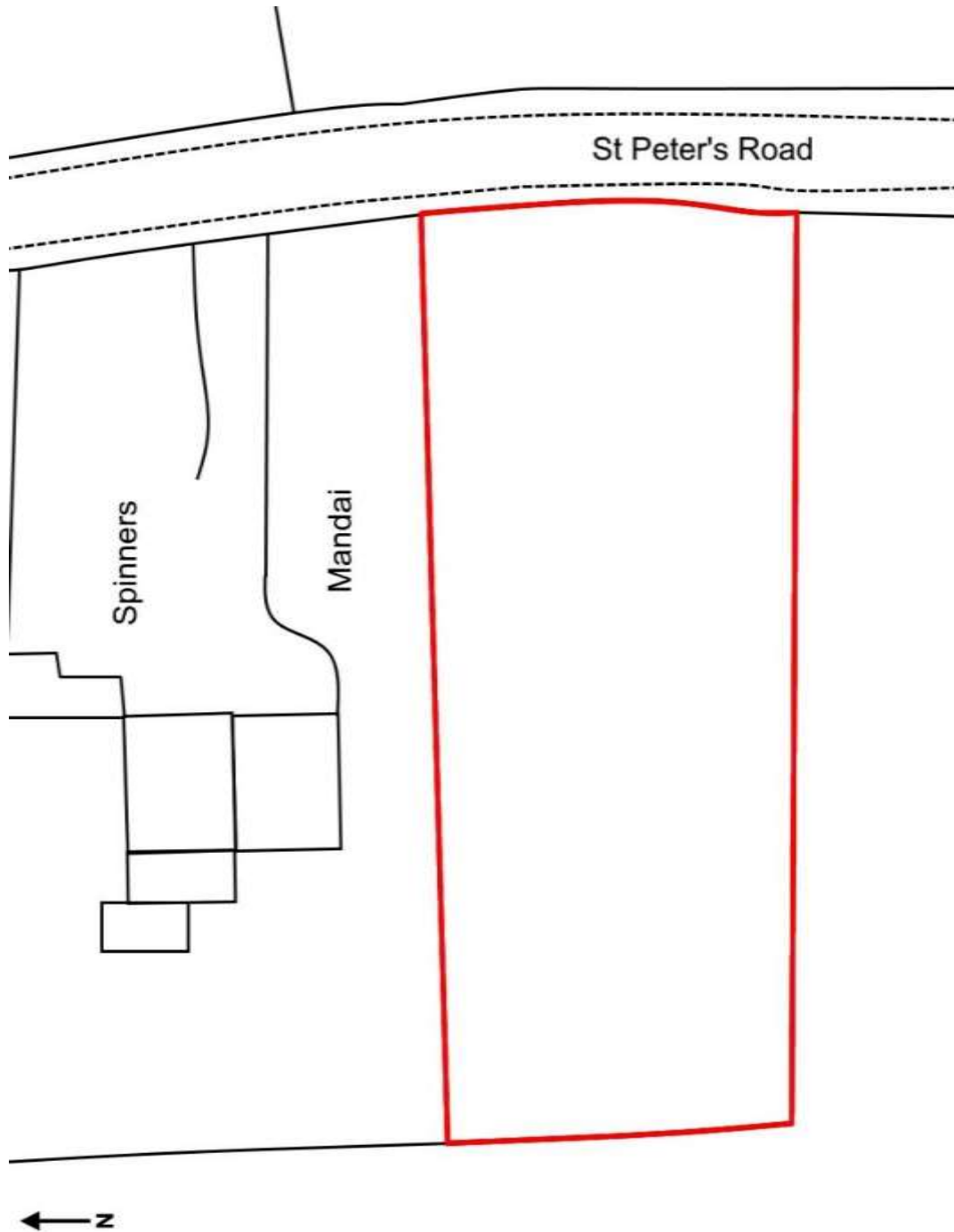


Figure 4. Locations of important sites for Brent Geese and waders around Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and Ramsar, taken from the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy, 2017 (site indicated by red arrow).

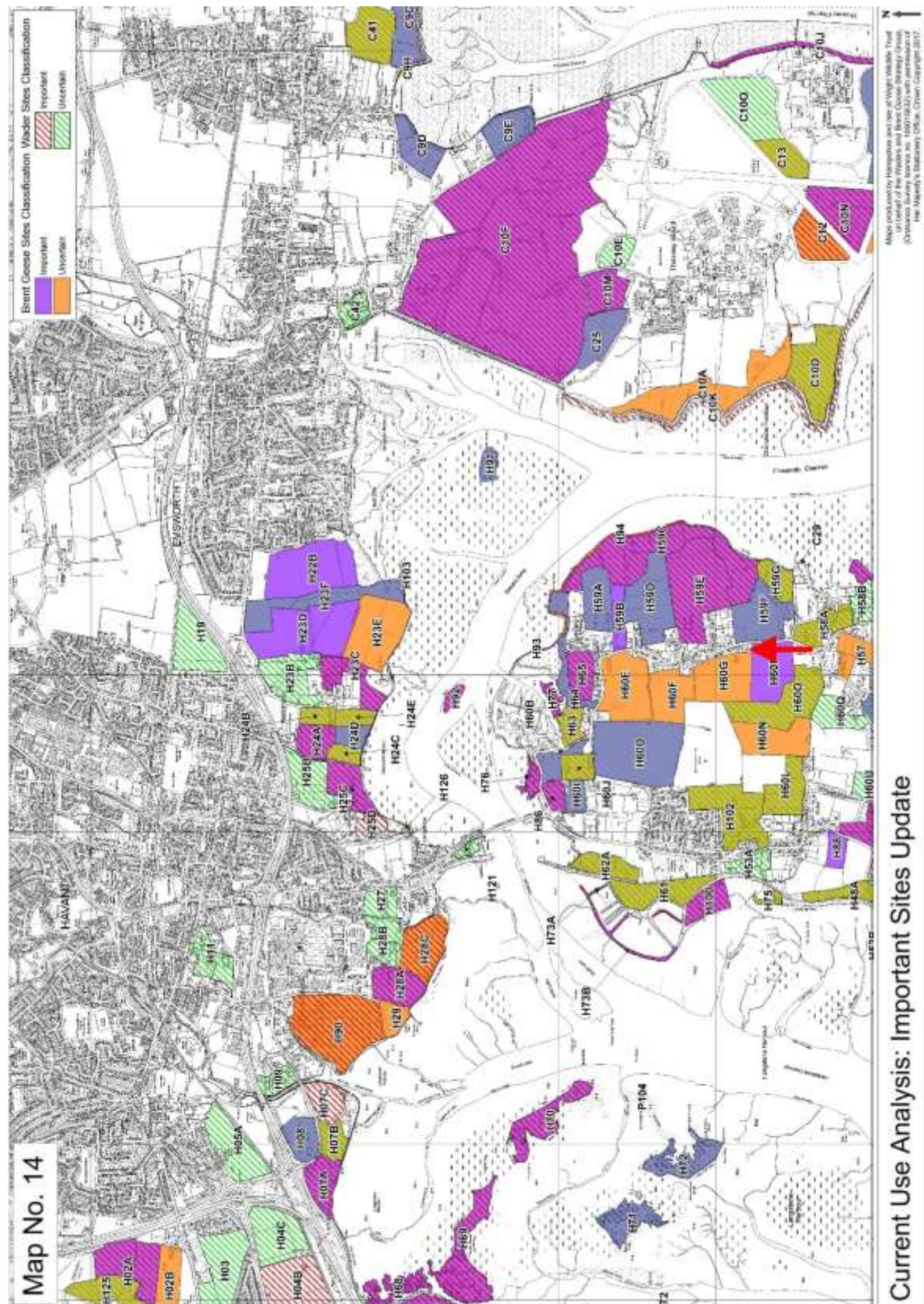


Figure 5. Aerial photograph showing the locations of Brent Geese and waders observed within 2km of the site.



7 PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1. The garden and sheds, facing north-west.



Photo 2. The garden and caravan, facing west.



Photo 3. A lawn at the western end of the site, facing south-west.



Photo 4. The garden, sheds and rough grassland, facing north-east.



Photo 5. Fencing and a tree-line along the southern boundary between the site and the adjacent arable field.



Photo 6. Fencing and hedges along the northern boundary with the adjacent property.



Photo 7. Small patch of rough grassland at the centre of the site.



Photo 8. A pile of rubble in the north-west corner of the site that is suitable hibernation habitat for widespread species of reptiles.



Photo 9. An arable field immediately to the south of the site that has been classified as important for Brent Geese and waders.



Photo 10. A grassland field across the road (to the east of the site) with eight Brent Geese foraging.



Photo 11. Two road hedges, separating the site from the field to the east with foraging Brent Geese.



Photo 12. A grassland field c.1,400m to the north-west of the site with a large flock of >300 foraging Brent Geese.



Bibby, C. J. *et al.* 2000. *Bird Census Techniques*. Second Edition. Academic Press, London.

Birds of Conservation Concern 4 Summary Booklet. www.rspb.org.uk. Accessed 17/01/18.

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