

APP/17/00454 | Variation of Condition Nos 12 (ecology), 14 (landscaping) and 15 (approved plans) of Planning Permission APP/16/00464 (Construction of 48 dwellings comprising 20 houses and 28 flats with associated landscaping, car parking, bin and cycle storage) to allow for a relocation of the foul pumping station to the south western corner of the site. | Land at the rear of 2-56, Blendworth Crescent, Havant 17.2062

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

As we know this site has been subject to works which have effectively destroyed most suitable habitat for bats along the western boundary and we are therefore in a salvage situation. The site is immediately adjacent to one of the most important serotine bat roosts in the county and therefore the provision of meaningful mitigation habitat is of primary importance. The actions taken to date have been highly unfortunate but at last some effort has been made to remedy the previous damage.

The application now includes a Bat Corridor Habitat Creation and Management Plan (EcoSupport, August 2017) which seeks to provide a way forward which will allow the previously well-vegetated western corridor to re-establish. I have also reviewed the submitted landscape plan and planting specification. As we know, the previous plantings at the boundary were inadequate and were in any case not maintained, such that many specimens had failed or had been sprayed. It is absolutely imperative that any vegetation plantings are monitored and managed appropriately at least until they are well established and I would strongly urge Havant Borough Council to undertake regular monitoring visits to ensure compliance.

The proposed timing of vegetation planting is understandable but will mean that there is effectively no bat habitat corridor during the 2018 breeding season: clearly this would not be the case had the original vegetation been left undisturbed. It is important that we get this habitat right in time for the 2019 season.

The proposed planting mixes for new hedgerow, scrub and trees are acceptable and, once established, should provide the dense scrubby corridor that is required. Similarly, the proposed wildflower seed mixes for the bunds and cellweb areas are acceptable but, as ever, success will be entirely dependent on ongoing monitoring and management.

My observations from two site visits was that the existing plantings were too narrow, forming a very slim single row 'hedge' immediately adjacent to the boundary fence, and would be better forming a staggered 2-or-3 row buffer extending several metres into the site. The proposed site plan does now show that additional plantings will be included in a much wider buffer area, with a suitable range of species at 4 per m². These plantings will need to take account of the proposed no dig restrictions around the mature oak tree and so I am unsure how the stated planting specifications fit with this (presumably there cannot be a 450mm dug bed beneath the tree canopy?). The end point for this buffer, however it is achieved, should be a dense native area of scrub which grades naturally into the adjacent wildflower grassland.

The success of the proposed wildflower grassland will be dependent on using the correct substrate i.e. not rich topsoil but an impoverished soil which will assist in preventing competition from vigorous herbs. Monitoring will be key and actions will have to be taken to address any weed flushes: clearly any spraying will need to avoid damage to planted specimens which, unfortunately, has not occurred to date.

I note from the planting specification that the wildflower area will be used as a '*visually pleasing space for relaxation*'. Does this mean that public access will be encouraged? How will this impact the primary objective of the space, which is to provide bat habitat? Recreational use will inevitably bring with it pressures to over-manage for the sole benefit of people: this would not be acceptable given the objective of the buffer. Clarification is requested from the ecologist on the issue of public access to the bat habitat corridor.

I would also highlight that the original Bat Mitigation report states that '*two Schwegler 1WI Summer and Winter bat boxes will be integrated within the brick work of two of the new properties*' and would request clarification that this has been achieved (photographs will be acceptable) or, if not, how this requirement of the planning permission is to be achieved. I note that bat boxes on trees are suggested now but would rather than such features be incorporated into dwellings as previously agreed.

In summary, the proposed remedial works to establish a meaningful bat corridor are much improved although some clarification is required and the success will need to be determined by the local planning authority.

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

Kind regards,

Tristan

Tristan Norton

**Senior Ecologist
Ecology Team**