

APP/16/00774 | Erection of 161 dwellings with associated parking, access, landscaping, and surface water drainage, pumping station, sub station and signalised junction onto Havant Road (amended scheme). | Land north of Havant Road and west of Selangor Ave, Emsworth 17.0572

Thank you for consulting me on this application. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you. Overall I have no overriding concerns with this proposal in terms of its ecological impact but consider that some additional information is required on the matter of impacts to off-site areas supporting wintering bird species.

The application is accompanied by an Extended Phase1 Habitat Survey (WYG, March 2017), Wintering Bird Survey (WYG, February 2017), Bat Activity Survey (WYG, February 2017) and Reptile Survey (WYG, March 2017) which together provide a useful assessment of the site's ecological constraints. The habitats within the site are not especially rich, comprising agriculturally-improved grassland with poor species-diversity with boundary and internal hedging. Other habitat present are scrub and herbaceous vegetation.

On the issue of the hedgerows and their ecological importance, they are clearly not 'important' as defined by the Regulations (they lack sufficient species diversity) and, whilst they undoubtedly provide valuable habitat for various species such as birds, they are not considered to be of particularly high ecological value.

In terms of protected species, the site supports a typical assemblage of bird species and a small number of slow-worms. No trees offering bat roosting potential were identified and the site is considered to offer moderate value bat foraging/commuting habitat. A total of six bat species have been recorded flying within the site, a fairly typical assemblage likely to be found within any similar site in south Hampshire.

The proposals include a 'receptor' area in the north-eastern corner of the site as well as a linear easement along its eastern boundary. It is proposed to retain the existing grassland and subject it to management suitable for reptiles (and other species). Reptiles will first be captured by hand with the aid of exclusion fencing. These measures are broadly acceptable and should result in a decent-sized area of suitable habitat. I would request clarification on the retention of dense scrub at the extreme north-eastern corner – this habitat is shown as present within the WYG habitat mapping but does not appear within the detailed soft landscaping plans. Is any existing scrub to be removed? It would be far better to retain a scrubby edge to the proposed receptor area.

As ever with mitigation strategies it is essential that management is carried out in accordance with the submitted details and that there is regular inspection of all works to ensure compliance.

Overwintering birds

The site features as Site H21 within the Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) 2010 and therefore constitutes supporting habitat for birds associated with the nearby Chichester & Langstone Harbours Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site. H21 has never supported SPA birds, although the level of survey effort deployed has not been sufficiently comprehensive to allow the site to conclusively be

'removed' from the SWBGS – the site was highlighted as a potential site for use by SPA birds but surveys for the 2010 strategy did not confirm this and there have been no records since then.

Wintering bird surveys have been carried out in 2013 (by Aluco Ecology) and again in 2014/15 (by WYG) with no SPA birds recorded. On the basis of information submitted so far it can be reasonably concluded that the fields within this site are not currently used and may indeed be unsuitable for use altogether – given the presence of internal hedging and livestock it is highly unlikely that brent geese in particular will occur and therefore the potential would be for grassland wader species such as curlew, lapwing, oystercatcher and golden plover. I am content that given the level of survey effort deployed at this site over the years there seems minimal potential for SPA birds to occur.

Some fields to the south of the site are however used by SPA birds. SWBGS sites H22B, H23D and H23F situated immediately south of the application site have each supported SPA birds in the past and I have certainly observed large numbers of brent geese in fields to the south of these (H23E) this last winter. These fields are larger than the application site, lack any internal hedging and are situated close to the water so the presence of SPA bird species is not surprising. Whilst it is unlikely that direct impacts would occur, given the distances between the application site and these fields, there may be an increase in recreational pressure which, if not managed, may result in impacts to SPA birds. I note that Natural England have suggested that any future permission is subject to a condition requiring the fencing of a PRow along Church Path some 700m due south of the site. The WYG bird report suggest that this measure is unachievable – it would require third-party consent and may require upgrading of the existing path. I think it is for the applicant to show that this indeed the case before dismissing this minor mitigation measure: this proposal would result in the loss of a site identified within the SWBGS and therefore some gesture at meaningful mitigation would be a positive outcome.

Alongside any site-specific measures there will clearly need to be a contribution towards the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership in order to mitigate for the in-combination effects of increased recreational disturbance.

In summary, whilst I do not have any significant concerns there are several matters which require further clarification if they are to be acceptable.

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

Kind regards,

Tristan

Tristan Norton

**Senior Ecologist
Ecology Team**