

Our ref: ECO01347_873

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Date: 8th February 2022

Douglas Symington,
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Lidl Havant – Ecological Technical Note (Response to LPA consultee comments)

RPS have been commissioned to prepare a short technical note in response to the recent LPA comments made by the ecologist, Tristan Norton, on the application for a new Lidl Food Store, off Purbrook Way, Havant; which was made in 2020 (reference number: APP/20/01221).

Broadly, the comments can be split into a number of sections, including: the need for an outline ecological enhancement strategy, and further information on species-specific enhancements (particularly for dormice and bats). To support the above response, the landscaping plan for the site has also been updated and is provided.

RPS Ecology undertook protected species for both dormice and bats, during the 2020-2021 survey season (RPS, 2021). These did not find any evidence of dormice to be present on the site, nor was there evidence to suggest that the site is particularly important to local bat species. The site did not appear to support numbers of mouse-eared bat species, either. This position has been accepted by the council's ecologist.

Outline Ecological Enhancement Strategy

The comments from the LPA noted that the landscaping plan indicated that much of the semi-natural vegetation from the centre of the site was to be removed in order to facilitate the development of the new retail store; and that the proposed landscaping was largely ornamental.

Therefore, in order to address the comments, RPS ecologists have worked with the project landscape architects (RPS) to prepare a more, ecologically friendly, scheme, which is native species led. The scheme now includes a range of habitats which will have a positive benefit for biodiversity, including wildflower meadow, native scrub / thicket, scattered trees and shrub planting.

The changes between this new scheme and the previous are summarised briefly, below:

- The existing vegetation along the eastern boundary has been retained within the site (equating to an area of 345m²), and the area of proposed 'Native Shrub Infill Mix' at the south eastern corner of the site has been extended.
- The ornamental shrub species within the scheme are limited to the immediate perimeter of the car park, where low maintenance, evergreen, non-thorny planting is appropriate.
- Diverse planting mixes have been incorporated rather than blocks of single species to enhance biodiversity and seasonal variation.
- These shrub planting mixes have been updated to include native common dogwood, whilst 61% of the ornamental shrubs to the perimeter of the car park are species listed on the 'RHS Perfect for Pollinators Plant List', therefore providing benefit to wildlife.
- The 'Groundcover Embankment' mixes focus upon a diverse mix of groundcover planting suitable for the location.

- All cotoneaster species have been removed and increased the quantity of native common ivy within the mixes to 50%, as this species provides long lasting evergreen cover and shelter for nesting birds and hibernating insects, as well as nectar for pollinators and berries for birds.
- The proposed tree planting is dominated by native cultivars and varieties.
- The mown lawn verge along the north western boundary has been amended to flowering lawn, which includes native wildflower species.
- The proposals now include a total area of 1,666m² native wildflower meadow planting and 422m² flowering lawn, totalling 66% of the available planting area on site.

Wildflower meadow / informal grassland

The grassland will comprise an appropriate native, neutral meadow grassland seed mix, or shade tolerant mix, where appropriate. All wildflower mixes will be managed via annual mowing to no less than 15 cm in height, in late summer once flowers have set seed. All arisings will be removed offsite.

The meadow grassland will provide habitat for a range of invertebrates, in turn providing a food source for both birds and bats.

Native scrub / thicket

The native shrub and thicket planting will provide flowers and fruit/berries/seeds (including hazel, holly, dogwood and field maple), but also groundcover. The scrub and groundcover planting will provide further diversity of habitat and will provide a good food source for and general habitat for dormice, along with both bats and nesting birds.

Retained broadleaved woodland / New tree planting

The new tree planting will be sourced from a local, reputable nursery, to ensure that it is of good quality. Planted blocks will be interspersed with long-grass glades, to create a mosaic of habitats that will be of particular benefit to foraging bats, invertebrates and birds.

New native trees will be included within the development, around the site boundaries and within the car parking area. These will provide further commuting routes for species of bats, along with nesting and foraging opportunities for birds. Other incidental tree planting will be included around the scheme.

The retention of existing grass glades within the woodland will further increase the structural diversity of the woodland. Although they will, generally, be managed as detailed above for long grass (i.e. cut once per year around late summer following flowering), the edges of the rides will be left to develop a taller structure with taller herbaceous vegetation, bramble etc. encouraged.

Native hedgerow planting

To further enhance the site, a series of new native hedgerows will be planted. The following key principles with respect to hedgerows will be followed, to ensure the establishment of such features represent a significant enhancement over the current situation and that they are managed for biodiversity benefit.

All new hedgerows will be encouraged to grow as thick as possible by topping and facing-up every other year once plants have flowered and fruited (usually late autumn).

Species-specific Enhancements

Dormice

Although dormice are widely known to be present within the local area, they were not found on site during the surveys (RPS, 2021). Notwithstanding this, the site location (in particular the eastern boundary strip), could act as a valuable green corridor across the wider landscape context, and therefore, enhancements for dormice have been considered within the landscaping plan. This will include the inclusion of new, scrub / thicket planting, and native hedgerow planting, with species chosen that have specific value to dormice (such as fruit-bearing trees).

Further to this, a minimum of three dormouse nest boxes will be installed around the site, in areas of suitable, retained habitat, indicative locations can be found on the Ecological Enhancement Plan (Figure 1). These boxes will be checked monthly for a period of two years following installation, in order to monitor whether the enhancements are encouraging dormice onto the site.

Bats

During the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Phase 1 survey work, a low population of bats was found to be using the site; and although the site is noted to be within a Bechstein bat sustenance zone, no evidence of such species was found to be utilising the site. However, populations of both common and soprano pipistrelles were noted, showing no localised evidence of activity. Given the results, the site is thought to offer moderate suitability for commuting and foraging bats.

Largely, the boundary features are to remain 'green' and so will be able to be used by bats for foraging/commuting, with lux levels >1 (bright moonlight), meaning that post-development, there will be no impacts to the foraging bat populations on site.

In order to increase the bat roost potential on site, two bat boxes will be included across the development, attached to retained, mature trees. Boxes will include a combination of the following:

- Schwegler 2FN; and
- Schwegler 2FF.

Both boxes provide roosting habitat for a range of species. These will be sited as high up as possible on buildings facing onto informal/natural greenspace to ensure a close proximity to foraging habitat. Their exact location is illustrated in Figure 1 (Ecological Enhancements).

Once installed, bat boxes require little maintenance. However, they will be inspected annually to ensure that any damage can be made good.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Although the Environment Bill 2021 has recently been passed; at present this is not yet required for new applications, unless the requirement for such is embedded in local policy. This position was backed up by a recent appeal in Wiltshire (reference number APP/Y3940/ W/21/3282365) where the Inspector found that whilst the Environment Act has been enacted, the relevant provisions haven't and there's no requirement for 10% BNG in the NPPF. Therefore, more weight should be given to the relevant local plan.

Based on the above, as there are no local policies which require development in Havant (or Hampshire), to provide a biodiversity net gain, it is not considered necessary to submit such information.

Whilst there is not a requirement to submit information relating to biodiversity net gain, with the inclusion of the above measures that are to be adopted on site post development, it is not considered unreasonable to assume the ecological value of the site will be improved.

Summary / Conclusions

In response to the most recent comments from the LPA, several amendments have been made to the scheme, in order to enhance the biodiversity value of the site, specifically for species which are known to occur on site or within the immediate wider area.

Do let me know if you need any further information, or if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

for RPS Consulting Services Ltd



Hannah Knight MSc MCIEEM

Principal Ecologist

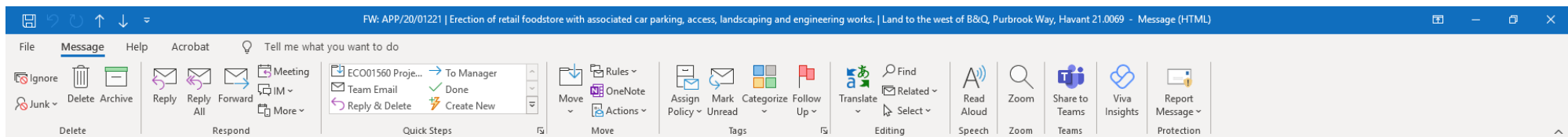
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Figure 1 – Ecological Enhancements

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Appendix 1 – LPA Ecology Comments



FW: APP/20/01221 | Erection of retail foodstore with associated car parking, access, landscaping and engineering works. | Land to the west of B&Q, Purbrook Way, Havant 21.0069

 Alastair Thornton <alastair@simply-planning.com>
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Dear Lewis,

APP/20/01221 | Erection of retail foodstore with associated car parking, access, landscaping and engineering works. | Land to the west of B&Q, Purbrook Way, Havant 21.0069

Thank you for consulting me on this application. Thank you for your patience.

The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (RPS, October 2020) and now a Dormouse and Bat Survey report (RPS< September 2021). The site comprises an area of dense scrub and rough grassland situated at the edge of an existing commercial development. The site sits within an immediate landscape dominated by woodland, with a large number of woodland Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) present. The grassland on site is reasonably species-rich, with two orchid species noted amongst a range of other herbaceous plants.

The scrub habitat is linked to areas of scrub and woodland off-site and then connected to the areas of woodland in the surrounding area. Surveys for Hazel Dormouse during 2020/21 recorded no evidence of this species and therefore the applicant is justified in assuming absence within the site. The surrounding landscape does support this declining species and the proposed site should provide landscape enhancements to encourage dormice.

This site sits well-within the zone of likely Bechstein's bat occurrence, and the well-wooded character of the surrounding landscape is likely to support a good range of bat species. Automated and walked transect bat surveys carried out during 2021 recorded regular activity by a small number of bat species across the site. There is no evidence to suggest that the site is particularly important to local bat species and it does not appear to support numbers of mouse-eared bat species such as Bechstein's Bat.

Little detail is presented on ecological mitigation, compensation and enhancement. The proposal will remove most of the existing semi-natural vegetation and landscaping proposal replace this with a standard mix of ornamental shrub species. Species included within the landscaping plan include two species of Cotoneaster. One of these, *Cotoneaster horizontalis*, is listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act: it is a highly invasive species and should not be used in proximity to high-value habitats such as ancient woodland. Native plantings and seeded grassland are restricted to the southernmost boundary, predominantly within Highways land. I would request that a more imaginative, native-led landscaping scheme is proposed that reflects the surrounding landscape and seeks to provide meaningful enhancements to the local ecological network. Expanses of amenity grassland that require regular mowing are a missed opportunity for biodiversity: wildflower-rich grasslands are a more cost-effective solution, require minimal management, will provide demonstrable benefits for biodiversity and will provide colour and interest throughout the year. Similarly, there are numerous native shrub/dwarf shrub species that could be used: these would be suited to the local landscape and soils.

The additional ecological information is welcome, in that it provides clarity on the status of certain protected species. The submission so far includes no detailed information on ecological mitigation, compensation or enhancement. On this basis, I would request that at least an outline ecological mitigation and enhancement strategy is provided prior to determination.

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

Kind regards,

Tristan

Tristan Norton

**Senior Ecologist
Ecology Team**