

Ecological Appraisal

Report for:

Havant Borough Council

Beachlands, Seafront, Hayling Island

Installation of Beach huts

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Written by:	L Roberts
Approved by:	A Egglesfield
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SUMMARY

This report constitutes an assessment of the potential impacts arising from the proposal and site set out below and provides recommendations to ensure that this proposal can reasonably avoid or mitigate such effects identified. If the proposal differs from that set out below, then this assessment and recommendations may not be applicable. Furthermore, the assessment and recommendations are based on surveys which may only be considered valid for up to two years following the date of this report.

- Havant Borough Council proposes the installation of around 40 beach huts at a site known as Beachlands, Hayling Island.
- An Extended Phase 1 Ecological Survey was undertaken on January 2015 to inform the proposals, which found that the site overlaps the Beachlands East a locally designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and is adjacent to the Sinah Common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Both sites are designated for the presence of coastal habitats of conservation interest, including unimproved grassland and vegetated shingle.
- In addition the Chichester and Langston Harbours Special Protection Area (SPA) is within 2km of the site, which is designated for important populations of breeding and wintering sea birds. Overwintering wader birds included within the Chichester and Langstone Harbour SPA designation have been recorded roosting on areas of shingle at high tide within 2km of the site.
- An additional site visit was made in late April 2015 to undertake a botanical assessment of the site at suitable time of year. It was found the site supports fairly extensive areas of vegetated shingle alongside unimproved acid grassland, but these are restricted to areas of the beach and do not occur in the car park area of the site. A line of 'dragon's teeth' forms the boundary between the beach and the car park.
- Vegetated shingle and unimproved grassland are priority habitats, and under the NERC Act (2006) all government bodies should have regard to their conservation in exercising their functions and are a material consideration in the planning process. It is recommended that impacts upon priority habitats could be avoided by positioning the beach huts on the car park side of the dragon's teeth at the car park.
- The installation of beach huts is likely to result in increased recreational pressures on the habitats within the vicinity of the site. Vegetated shingle is known to be particularly vulnerable to trampling whereas trampling and eutrophication could impact upon unimproved acid grassland occurring within the Sinah Common SSSI and Beachlands East SINC designated sites. It will therefore be necessary to employ mitigation measures to avoid such impacts, such as by ensuring beach hut occupiers are informed regarding the presence of sensitive habitats, for example by installing an interpretation board and providing information packs to occupiers. The opinions of Natural

England should be canvassed regarding the potential for impacts to the SSSI, and it is possible that further mitigation/ compensation would be required.

- The potential for recreational impacts upon the Chichester and Langstone Harbour SPA has been considered. It is anticipated that usage of the beach huts in winter is likely to be minimal and that given that the site is separated from the SPA and sites known to be used by overwintering birds by a considerable distance, the proposals are unlikely to result in a likely significant impact on the SPA on their own. However when considered in combination with other plans or projects, such as residential development, it is concluded that the proposals would result in a likely significant effect. The Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership has been established to address this issue by using financial contributions from developments near the coast to develop projects specifically designed to manage this increasing visitor pressure on coastal SPAs along the Solent. It is therefore proposed that if a suitable scale of contributions was made (either by Havant Borough Council directly and up-front, or as an element of the rental income from the huts) then this would be sufficient to be able to conclude no likely significant effect. It is recommended that data regarding winter usage of beach huts are obtained to confirm whether or not beach huts are used extensively in winter and that Natural England are consulted regarding these conclusions and to advise whether formal Habitats Regulation Assessment is required.
- Construction phase impacts upon the SPA could be avoided by undertaking works outside of the wintering bird season (*i.e.* works April-September inclusive).

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Proposal

Havant Borough Council proposes to install approximately 40 beach huts at a site known as Beachlands, Hayling Island, Hampshire, PO11 9HP. The wooden huts would be assembled *in-situ* within the car park and placed on railway sleepers. Machinery is not proposed to be used on the vegetated shingle. The proposed location of the beach huts is indicatively shown on Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Proposed location of the beach huts indicated by line A-B

1.1.2 Ecology Background

A desk extended Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken at the site by Hampshire County Council Ecology Team (HCCET) in January 2015. It was found that the proposed development site supported vegetated shingle, which is a habitat of principle importance (priority habitat). It was recommended that a repeat botanical assessment should be undertaken in spring/ summer to get a better understanding of the habitats present at the site. The results of the initial survey and botanical assessment are included within this report.

1.1.3 Limitations to Report

The repeat botanical survey was undertaken at a suitable time of year for botanical survey. Although every effort was made to identify all plant species present, it is possible that a small number were not recorded. However, it was possible to identify the vast majority of plant species present and therefore this is not considered to be a significant limitation.

2 METHODS

2.1 Desk-based Assessment

A desk-based assessment was carried out by HCCET on 11 February 2015, updated on 14 May 2015. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) mapping was used in order to identify all records of protected species and habitats within a 1km radius of the site, with an extended 5km radius used for internationally designated sites. In addition, records were obtained of all statutory and non-statutory designated nature conservation sites within the search radius.

HCCET had full access to the extensive biological database held by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC). The data is aggregated to meet the HBIC Data Users Agreement and attention is drawn to paragraph 5 of the agreement which states: *'Whilst every reasonable effort is made to validate information supplied to and by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, owing to the dynamic and judgmental nature of information relating to wildlife, HBIC disclaims any responsibility for the accuracy or comprehensiveness of the information supplied, and accepts no liability for any indirect, consequential, or incidental damages or losses arising from use of the information'*.

In addition datasets from The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (2010) were accessed to gather information regarding the use of nearby habitats by wintering birds.

2.2 Extended Phase 1 Ecological Survey

An Extended Phase 1 Ecological Survey was carried out on 30 January 2015. A survey area was defined comprising the proposed location of the beach and adjacent habitats. The survey area is shown on Figure 2 below. The survey entailed a single surveyor undertaking a methodical investigation of all areas of the survey area in order to identify the presence of, or habitat considered suitable for supporting, notable and/ or legally-protected species. All Phase 1 (JNCC, 2010) habitat types were identified and a list was compiled of characteristic plant species within each habitat type.

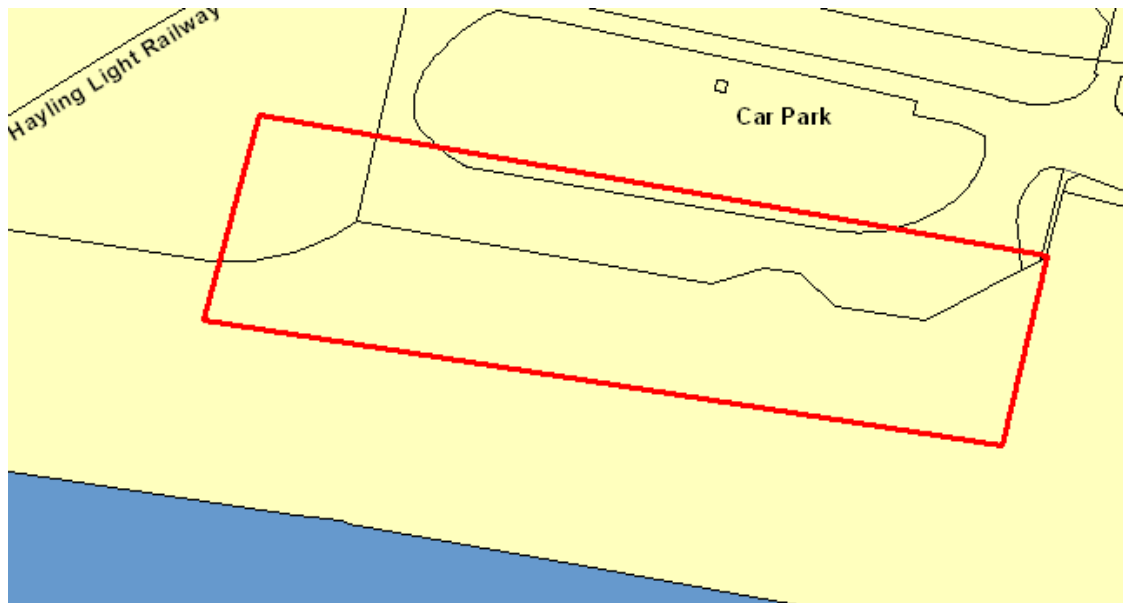


Figure 2: The survey area encompassed the proposed location of the beach huts and adjacent habitats.

2.3 Botanical Assessment

A site visit was made on 24 April to undertake a botanical assessment at the site. The survey focused on the areas of vegetated shingle and grassland which could be impacted by the proposals. The distribution of vegetation types within the survey area was mapped and a list was compiled of the constituent plant species.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Desk-based Assessment

3.1.1 Designated Sites

Two European sites, including a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA), one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and two locally-designated Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) are located within 1km of the site. **Table 1** provides details of these sites.

Table 1: Designated sites located within 1km of the site

Site Name	Distance and Direction from Site (km)	Reason for Designation
Internationally designated sites (5km)		
Solent Maritime SAC	120m south	Supporting coastal habitats of conservation interest, including <i>Spartina</i> swards and Atlantic salt meadows.
Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA	1.5km north (also occurring to 2.9km west and 1.6km east of the site)	Designated due to internationally important populations of breeding, passage and wintering birds, including dark bellied brent goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i> .
Nationally designated sites (1km)		
Sinah common Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Adjacent, west	Site is designated due to coastal habitats including vegetated shingle habitats supporting several nationally scarce plant species.
Locally designated sites (1km)		
Beachlands East (SINC)	Overlapping with the site	Locally designated site designated due to presence of the following locally scarce plant species namely: sand sedge <i>Carex arenaria</i> ; toothed medick <i>Medicago polymorpha</i> ; Upright Chickweed <i>Moenchia erecta</i> ; English stonecrop <i>Sedum anglicum</i> ; Suffocated Clover <i>Trifolium suffocatum</i> ; and sea mayweed <i>Tripleurospermum maritimum</i> .
Hayling Island Beach (SINC)	380m east	Locally designated site designated due to presence of the locally scarce plant species, including: mossy stonecrop <i>Crassula tillaea</i> ; smooth cat's-ear <i>Hypochaeris glabra</i> ; sea knotgrass <i>Polygonum maritimum</i> ; dune fescue <i>Vulpia fasciculata</i> ; mat-grass fescue <i>Vulpia unilateralis</i> .

3.1.2 Protected/ notable species

A review of the biological database held by HBIC indicated the presence of several notable plant species, as noted in Table 1 above regarding the SINCDesignations, primarily associated with the areas of shingle grassland in the vicinity of the site, including mossy stonecrop, suffocated clover and English stonecrop in the close vicinity of the site. Common bat species have also been recorded within 1km of the site.

A review of the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (2010) found records of wintering wader birds using habitats within the vicinity of the site. Wading birds have been recorded roosting on habitats to the east and west of the site, although data is not available to determine whether these are important roosting sites. The nearest record is approximately 1.2km to the west of the site (see Figure 3 below).



Figure 3: The location of the site in relation to known wader roosts (in yellow)

3.2 Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey

3.2.3 Background

This section is based upon the extended phase 1 habitat survey undertaken in January 2015.

3.2.1 Vegetation

The following Phase 1 habitat types were identified within the survey area:

- Shingle;
- Dune grassland;
- Amenity grassland; and
- Hardstanding.

These habitats are described below, and their distribution can be seen on the aerial photograph below (Figure 4). Photographs of the site are included on Figure 5.



Figure 4: Aerial photograph of site

Shingle

The most abundant habitat within the survey area is shingle. This habitat is fairly sparsely vegetated with characteristic species of this habitat type, including sea kale *Crambe maritima*, sea beet *Beta vulgaris*, long horned poppy *Glaucium flavum*, prickly sow-thistle *Sonchus asper* and common mallow *Malvus sylvestris*.

Dune grassland

Grassland to the north west of the site is observed to be comparatively species rich and containing characteristic coastal species including sea plantain *Plantago*

maritima and English stonecrop *Sedum anglicum*. Other species recorded include perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, fescue grass *Festuca* spp and mouse-ear hawk weed *Pilosella officinarum*.

Amenity grassland/ hard standing

A rough uneven amenity grassland margin is located along the border between the hardstanding of the car park and the shingle beach. Species recorded include creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*.



Figure 4: The site contains areas of vegetated shingle, which were largely in their dormant phase and the time of survey.

3.3 Botanical Assessment

3.3.1 Background

This section outlines the results of the botanical survey undertaken in April 2015.

3.3.2 Results

The following habitat types were identified in the botanical assessment survey: Vegetated shingle, dune grassland and amenity grassland. These are described below, with photographs shown on Figure 5 below the text.

Vegetated Shingle

The vegetation was observed to be fairly abundant within the beach area of the site, with the following species were identified:

- Common mallow *Malvus sylvestris*;
- Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*;
- Curled dock *Rumex crispus*;
- Long horned poppy *Glaucium flavum*;
- Orache *Atriplex* sp.;
- Ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*;
- Sea kale *Crambe maritime*;
- Sea beet *Beta vulgaris*;
- Spear thistle *Cisium vulgare*;
- Spotted medick *Medicago lupulina*; and
- Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*.

Unimproved acid grassland

Grassland in front (south) of the dragon's teeth which form the boundary to the car park comprises a dry and generally unimproved acid grassland, with some ruderal species and species of improved grassland present. The following species were recorded in these areas:

- Bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*;
- Buck's horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*;
- Cat's ear *Hypochaeris radicata*;
- Common vetch *Vicia satvia*;

- Dandelion *Taraxicum officinale* agg.;
- Mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*;
- Perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*;
- Red fescue *Festuca rubra*;
- Ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*;
- Sea campion *Silene uniflora*;
- Squirrel-tail fescue *Vulpia bromoides*;
- Stonecrop *Sedum* spp.
- White clover *Trifolium repens*
- Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*;

Improved grassland

Grassland behind (north, within the body of the car park) the dragon's teeth is notably more improved in nature supporting a lower diversity of species. Perennial rye-grass is largely dominant alongside other characteristic species such as common creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, daisy *Bellis perennis*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, common mallow and yarrow.



Figure 5: Photographs of the site. Areas of unimproved acid grassland and vegetated shingle occur on the beach side of the dragon's teeth that form the boundary between the beach and the car park

4 Impacts

4.1 Introduction

This section is supported by the results of the Extended Phase 1 Ecological Survey and subsequent botanical assessment survey and presents the likely impacts, in the absence of any mitigating actions, on protected and notable habitats and species associated with the proposed development. Only those features confirmed as present on site or considered to have from low to high potential occurrence on site have been taken forward for further assessment. In addition, all designated sites identified within the desk based assessment have been taken forward for further assessment.

4.2 Designated Sites

4.2.1 Habitat Loss

Siting the beach huts directly on the shingle beach would cause the direct loss of vegetated shingle and unimproved grassland priority habitat types, which would constitute a negative impact to the Beachlands East locally-designated SINC.

4.2.2 Recreational Impacts

Sinah Common SSSI and Beachlands East SINC

Vegetated shingle occurs widely in the area, including within Sinah Common SSSI immediately west of the proposed siting of the beach huts and within Beachlands East SINC which overlaps with the site. Vegetated shingle is known to be particularly sensitive to physical damage such as could be caused by trampling caused by increased visitor numbers. Unimproved acid /dune grassland, from which notable plant species have been recorded, is more resilient although somewhat sensitive to trampling, and could be impacted by eutrophication such as could be caused by increase in dog or food waste being left behind by visitors.

SSSIs are protected under national legislation from damage or destruction and SINCs receive protection through the planning system.

Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA

Areas of coastline within the vicinity (1.6km at the closest point) of the site are included within this strictly protected site, which is designated *inter alia* on the basis of overwintering birds including wading birds and brent geese. Wading birds included within this designation have been recorded within the 2010 Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy using habitats within the vicinity of the site to roost at high tide. It is considered that construction and recreational impacts, such as increased dog walking on the beach in winter, could result in disturbance to wintering birds, which has been demonstrated to lead to increased mortality of birds. This would be considered to be a significant negative impact upon this designated site.

No records of brent goose feeding areas are identified near the beach hut site, and given that the site is largely shingle, it does not appear to present good foraging habitat for this species.

There are two identified high-tide wader roosts along this stretch of the beach – H104 and H105. These lie around a kilometre away from the site (1.1km and 0.9km respectively). The level of survey work regarding these sites is currently insufficient to draw robust conclusions; however the limited number of survey visits carried out 2007-2009 found low numbers of waders, as follows:

H104 – Peak count of 3 oystercatcher, 2 sanderling and 28 turnstone;

H105 – Peak count of 1 oystercatcher.

It is not possible to draw firm conclusions at this stage regarding the importance of these roosts. Nevertheless, given the site location and the distance between the proposed huts and the roosts, it can reasonably be concluded there would be no direct impacts on these from the huts.

Given the relatively small quantity of beach huts proposed and the distance from the wader roosts, it is suggested that these proposals on their own would not present a likely significant effect on the SPA. Further clarification of this opinion could be gained through a study of existing beach hut users to clarify if there is a reduced level of usage in the winter months.

In view of these factors, it is considered that while there would not be a likely significant effect on the SPA from the beach huts on their own, there would be a likely significant effect on the SPA when considered in combination with other plans or projects – particularly any new residential development within 5.6km of the SPA (in line with the findings of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership (SDMP) and the Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Havant Borough Council local plan). To address this issue, the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership has been established. This uses financial contributions from developments near the coast to develop, implement and run projects specifically designed to manage this increasing visitor pressure on coastal SPAs along the Solent. It is therefore proposed that if a suitable scale of contributions was made (either by Havant Borough Council directly and up-front, or as an element of the rental income from the huts) then this would be sufficient to be able to conclude no likely significant effect.

4.2.3 Other Designated Sites

Negative impacts to the other designated sites identified within the desk study are not anticipated.

4.3 Habitats/Vegetation

Both vegetated shingle and the unimproved acid grassland habitat types are considered to be priority habitats, type as identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). Furthermore, the species sea kale and long horned poppy recorded in this habitat are county rare species. Under the NERC legislation, all government bodies must have regard to the conservation of biodiversity with particular reference to habitats (and species) identified under Section 41, and the presence of such species is a material consideration in the planning process.

In the absence of mitigation, the proposals are could result in a negative impact to this habitat type, through direct loss and by recreation associated impacts such as trampling, litter and dog waste. Recommendations for mitigation are therefore outlined within Section 5 of this report.

5 Recommendations

This section provides details of recommendations considered necessary in order to ensure that potential ecological constraints are considered fully. This includes recommendations for avoidance, mitigation, compensation or enhancement measures to avoid, lessen or offset the identified impacts to ecological features arising from the proposed works.

5.1 Avoidance

5.1.1 Designated Sites – Construction Phase

In order to avoid causing disturbance to wintering birds associated with the Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA during the construction of the beach huts, it is recommended that construction should be undertaken outside of the wintering bird season (*i.e.* works April-September Inclusive). If this is not possible it would be necessary to demonstrate no likely significant impact within a Habitats Regulations screening assessment, using appropriate mitigation measures where appropriate.

5.1.2 Habitats

In order to avoid direct impacts to the vegetated shingle and unimproved acid grassland habitats occurring at the Beachlands site, it is recommended that the beach huts are installed behind the existing dragon's teeth which form the boundary between the car park and the beach. This would result in indirect impacts to the habitats and designated site being negligible in magnitude.

5.2 Mitigation

5.2.1 Designated sites – Sinah Common SSSI and Beachlands East SINC

Mitigation measures should be included within proposals to avoid negative recreational impacts upon the vegetated shingle and unimproved grassland habitats occurring within Sinah Common SSSI and Beachlands East SINC. These could include measures taken to educate beach hut occupiers regarding the importance and vulnerability of the shingle and grassland habitats in the area, with the aim of encouraging them to use the habitats at the beach sensitively. This could include installing an interpretation board at the beach and providing an information pack to all occupiers of the beach huts. It is recommended that Natural England are engaged regarding the proposals to seek their opinions and determine an appropriate level of mitigation, and it is possible that additional measures such as those outlined within Section 5.3 below may be required.

5.2.2 Designated Sites- Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA

It is recommended that data is obtained to determine the usage of beach huts during the winter period (October-March inclusive). If, as anticipated, it is found that occupancy levels are low, it is recommended that Natural England are consulted regarding the acceptability of the conclusions within this report of no likely significant effect on the SPA, but possible in-combination effects. In order to mitigate for in combination impacts, an appropriate contribution to the SDMP fund should be determined in consultation with Natural England.

If winter usage of the beach huts is found to be higher than anticipated or Natural England consider the approach outlined within this report, it would be necessary to consider the proposals in more detail within a formal Habitats Regulations Assessment.

5.3 Compensation and Enhancement

The scale of the impacts associated with increased recreational pressures is difficult to quantify in the absence of detailed information regarding the likely use of the beach by the hut occupiers, and therefore it is not possible to determine whether there would be any residual impacts from the proposals following the implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures, and therefore it is not clear whether compensatory measures would be required to offset impacts.

Carrying out a visitor survey to determine how existing beach hut occupiers use the beach would allow a more accurate impact assessment to be made with regard to the proposals and determine the need for further mitigation/ compensation measures.

There is substantial scope to provide ecological enhancements/ compensation measures to the surrounding habitats. These could include:

- Increasing extent of vegetated shingle by collecting seeds from existing vegetated shingle to grow as plug plants for planting in bare areas of shingle;
- Undertaking habitat management measures to areas of improved grassland to promote the growth of more species rich swards; and
- Carrying out habitat management works to grassland areas such as selective removal of scrub.

6 REFERENCES

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