

12th November 2012

Chris Flint Associates
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Dear Mr Flint,

RE: Ecological appraisal of land off Havant Road, Hayling Island

Ecosupport Ltd was commissioned by Chris Flint Associates Ltd to carry out an ecological appraisal of a plot of land off Havant Road, Hayling Island and to the north of 132 Havant Road. This survey was carried out on the 7th November 2012. The details and findings of the survey are set out below.

The methodology was loosely based on the Phase I habitat assessment methodology as outlined by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (modified to suit the situation).

Site Description

The site comprises of agriculturally improved grassland, tall ruderals, dense scrub, bounding fence line and a drainage ditch off Havant Road, Hayling Island, Portsmouth, PO11 0LJ (OS grid reference SU 719 026) (**Image 1**).

Image 1. The site proposed for development and the immediate landscape. The approximate site boundary is shown in red.



The surrounding landscape is semi rural with a horse grazed pasture field bounding the west of the site (separated by an fence line) and arable land across Havant Road to the east. The Langstone Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA) is approximately 0.3 km to the west of the site.

Proposed Development

It is understood that the proposals include construction of 4 new, two-storey detached dwellings with associated garages, hard standing car parking and landscaping. The scrub bounding the west of the site is to be removed and replaced with a new native species hedge with trees.

Scope

A Phase I ecological appraisal is the first step in assessing the potential ecological effects (or lack of) of a proposed development activity. The purpose of an ecological survey is not to provide a definitive ecological assessment of a development and will often recommend that further ecological investigations are required.

Identification of suitable habitats and features to support protected species was undertaken during the initial Phase I walk over survey through a visual assessment of the site and the surrounding landscape adjacent.

Relevant Legislation and Policy

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is the primary piece of legislation by which biodiversity in the UK is protected. The most relevant areas of the Act to development related activities are:

- The identification and subsequent protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which prohibits damaging activities
- The protection of certain species listed in Schedule 5, which prohibits killing, injury, disturbance, damage and/or destruction of breeding sites and/or resting places and sale (it should be noted that all parts of this protection do not apply to all Scheduled species)
- The protection of wild birds and their nests, which prohibits damage or destruction of nests whilst in use.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (known as the 'Habitats Regulations') passed two EEC Directives into UK law. The Regulations protect sites and species deemed to be of conservation importance across Europe. The most relevant parts of the Regulations to development related activities are:

- The protection of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- The protection of species listed within Schedule 2 of the Regulations, which prohibits killing, injury, disturbance, damage and/or destruction of breeding sites and/or resting places and sale, this confers some level of habitat protection. In order for activities that would be likely to result in a breach of species protection under the regulations to legally take place, a European Protected Species (EPS) licence must first be obtained from Natural England.

Government policy with respect to the protection of biodiversity is laid out in section 11 of the new

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which supersedes Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9). This outlines how 'the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment'. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should promote 'opportunities to incorporate biodiversity in and around developments' where ever possible. At a local level this development falls within the boundary of Havant Borough Council. Within Havant Borough, Policy CS 11 (Protecting and Enhancing the Special Environment and Heritage of Havant Borough) of the adopted Core Strategy (2011) sets out how the natural and rural character of sites should be conserved by limiting impacts on biodiversity, including the creation of additional habitats.

Survey Results

(N.B. The following information provides a broad description of the main habitats found within the survey area. Specific features of ecological interest, such as trees, hedges, are described in the relevant sections below).

The following habitats were identified on site during the walkover:

- Improved grassland – This was the dominant habitat on site. It was grazed during the survey. Owing the presence of a horse and foal within the field it was not possible to establish a full species list however the field was considered to be an improved grazed pasture field and be of low overall diversity (Image 2).

Image 2. View of the site from the southern boundary



- Dense scrub- This bounded the eastern part of the site and was dominated by Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) with occasional Hedge Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*) and *Salix* spp. (Image 3). This has grown over the wooden fence that delineated the eastern extent of the field.
- Tall ruderals – A patch of Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) was present in the southern eastern corner of the site overgrowing a small tin structure (Image 3).

Image 3. Tall ruderal patch in south-eastern corner of the site.



- Scattered trees – There are two *Salix spp.* Present in the central part of the field. Owing to the high levels of rainfall over recent months an ephemeral pool had developed around these however it was considered that this would desiccate as soon the conditions became drier and likely not be suitable to support protected amphibians.
- Wet ditch – There is a drainage ditch bounding the northern extent of the site which, based on a Promap view of the site, forms part of drainage system which runs long this and the neighboring field (to the west) and across Havant Road (through a culvert).
- Fence – There is a wooden stock proof fence line bounding the southern and eastern extents of the site. The fence along the western boundary has been overgrown by dense Bramble scrub.

The two shrubby Willow trees in the centre of the site were also assessed for their potential to support features which may be used by roosting bats (such as cracks, fissures in the bark, dense Ivy coverage, woodpecker holes). Based on this visual assessment using binoculars the trees could be classified as category 3 (i.e. trees with no features suitable for bats) according to the Bat Conservation Trusts good practice guidelines (2012).

Limitations

The ecological appraisal was conducted during October, generally considered to be outside of the optimal period as most vascular plants are no longer flowering. However as this field was a fairly typical example of improved grassland it was not considered that timing constraints posed a significant limitation on the survey results.

As mentioned previously, due to safety concerns, the field was not directly entered, with observations instead made from the edges using 8 x 42 binoculars where appropriate. This method prevented a full species list of the grassland from being made and of the vegetation associated with the ditch. This presents a minor limitation on the findings of the survey, although for the grassland, it was not considered to affect its overall evaluation in terms of its ecological value.

Evaluation of Results

When evaluated in its entirety, the site is considered to be of low ecological value however, still supports some habitat features, which may be used by protected species. Notwithstanding this, the habitats on site are not of intrinsic ecological value and are common throughout Havant Borough.

A search of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), found there to be no records noted for any protected species from within the site boundary or within 2 kilometres.

Nesting birds

The scrubby areas on site and the two Willows provide suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds

Bats

There is low - moderate potential for foraging bats on site with some linear features (hedge / scrub lines. Drainage ditch) and pastoral grassland areas suitable for foraging and commuting. The two Willow trees on site due to be removed are scrubby and not mature enough to support any features which could be used by roosting or resting bats.

Reptiles

There are limited areas along the northern boundary flanking the ditch, which the grassland is ungrazed and so was considered to be of low potential to support common reptile species. However, suitability was further reduced through a lack of connectivity with other suitable surrounding habitats.

Designated Sites

Within 300 metres of the site and across the Havant Road to the west is Langstone Harbour which is incorporated within the designated area of Chichester & Langstone Harbours SPA. The site qualifies for selection as an SPA by supporting breeding, over wintering and passage bird populations of European importance that use the intertidal areas of the estuary with roosting and nesting birds using the associated islands within the shallow estuarine basin. Langstone Harbour is also included within the Solent Maritime SAC designation and in particular qualifies for the estuarine habitats and associated vegetation communities present. In addition the area is designated as a SSSI for but not primarily for the littoral sediment habitats and bird numbers.

Of particular relevance in respect of the application proposal is the potential increased disturbance levels to both nesting and wintering birds using the close by Langstone Harbour. Disturbances can have negative impacts upon individual birds by increasing energy outputs requiring birds to actively take flight and/or seek other feeding areas rather than use known suitable feeding areas that are being disturbed by human and associated factors (dogs, vehicle movements etc.).

Recommendations

Nesting birds

The areas of dense scrub and scattered trees on site should be removed outside of the bird-nesting season (March – September inclusive) if required. If this is not possible then clearance should be preceded by a check for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist. If any nests are found a buffer of 3m would be required and the chicks to be allowed to fledge before removal could proceed.

Reptiles

It is not considered necessary to carry out a dedicated reptile survey, as the majority of the site is unsuitable. The drainage ditch along which there are areas of limited suitability is also to be retained post development and as such measures can be taken ensure impacts to this area are minimal and its suitability can be enhanced.

Bats

As this area currently presents a low suitability habitat for foraging bats, to avoid undue disturbances, it is recommended that any external lighting proposed for the new dwellings be hooded and of low wattage (where practicable). This will minimize undue spillover into the surrounding habitat and potential disturbances this may cause to feeding and commuting bats.

As any trees on site have been scoped out, in terms of suitability to support roosting bats no further actions are considered necessary.

Designated Sites

Given the limited number of housing units proposed for the site the overall increase of visitors and potential significant increase in disturbances to birds within the designated sites of Langstone Harbour would not it is considered be measurable above the existing levels. As part of the development proposals marketing information will inform any potential new buyers of the sensitivity of the Langstone harbour SPA. Furthermore, new occupants will be provided with literature within the sales information, which details particularly sensitive areas of the SPA. In particular location and importance of the Hayling Oyster Beds and the associated winter bird roosts and spring and summer nesting areas and adverse impacts from human associated disturbances.

Ecological Enhancements

The new development should include features, which will enhance overall opportunities for onsite biodiversity, thus meeting the principles of NPPF and Policy CS 11 of the Havant Core Strategy.

The hedgerow proposed for the boundary of the site (based on the current landscape drawing made available to Ecosupport Ltd) should use native species of local provenance. This should include species of known benefit to wildlife such as Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Field Maple (*Acer campastre*) and Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*). The trees to be planted within the hedge should also be natives, which can include Oak (*Quercus robur*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*).

A native species hedgerow following a similar specification should also be planted along the western boundary of the site to provide further connectivity within the landscape for various wildlife groups. Hedgerows should be planted in a staggered double row incorporating 5 plants per linear metre.

In respect of the ditch located on the northern boundary the developed scrub which significantly shades the ditch will be reduced to provide light into the standing water areas and encourage marginal vegetation to develop. The ditch will be protected and retained as an ecological feature and will not be impacted by the development proposals.

As the new development is within a semi rural location where bats are likely to be using the linear features on site, two of the new properties will include bat features incorporated into the constructional materials. The Schwegler 1FR tube or similar will be used as this model is subtle and unobtrusive and is self-contained once installed. These features can then provide roosting opportunities for a variety of bat species and help meet with the biodiversity gains that the NPPF and Havant Core Strategy seek to achieve from new developments.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Ecologist

www.ecosupport.co.uk

References

Havant adopted Core Strategy (2011) Havant Borough Council

Bat Conservation Trust (2012) Bat surveys: Good practice guidelines 2nd edition