

Dear Denise,

APP/25/00335 | Proposed change of use of amenity space associated with the Public Service Plaza to outside play area for children attending Growing Places Nursery. Associated erection of a boundary fence with 1No pedestrian gate and 1No double gate to allow grass cutting. | Public Service Plaza, Civic Centre Road, Havant, PO9 2AX

Thank you for consulting me on this application. The application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Roost Assessment (Arbtech, July 2025) and a Biodiversity Net Gain Exemption Statement (Arbtech, July 2025).

The application site comprises an area of grassland situated to the rear of the Public Service Plaza. For the past two years this area has been included within a purposeful 'relaxed mowing' programme of grassland management as part of a wider initiative to enhance biodiversity at the site. The grassland within the application has proven to be a moderately species-rich example of neutral grassland. Alongside various grass, sedge and herbaceous species the site supports at least four native orchid species. Surveys carried out by the Council in 2024 and 2024 have identified both Pyramidal Orchid and Common Spotted Orchid within the application site. I agree that the grassland does not meet the definition of Priority Habitat.

The proposed development will effectively result in the functional loss of the grassland due to the need for regular mowing, as well as footfall/trampling. On the matter of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the application includes an exemption statement. This concludes that the habitat loss associated with the proposal would meet the de minimis exemption, affecting less than 25m² of habitat. I am content to agree that this is the case in this instance: the proposed development is clearly of significant benefit to the nursery, allowing access to a valuable outdoor space for children and staff. I would however be resistant to any future proposal for any permanent surfacing within the fence that results in a permanent loss of grassland habitat.

Given the biodiversity value of the grassland, and its inclusion in the Council's strategy for biodiversity enhancement at the Plaza site, the Council should make available a similarly-sized area elsewhere on site for inclusion in the enhancement programme.

Overall, I am content with the submitted information.

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

Kind regards,

Tristan

Tristan Norton

Principal Ecologist | E: tristan.norton@havant.gov.uk M: 07552 248974

Planning Services, Havant Borough Council, Public Service Plaza, Havant, PO9 2AX