

6<sup>th</sup> March 2023

RE: Ecological Statement for 'Land East of Knowle Lane, Fair Oak, SO50 7DZ'

### **Brief / Aim**

Ecosupport Ltd. have been commissioned by Parsons Construction Ltd. to provide an Ecological Statement to support their current planning application for the development at the East Horton Business Park, Fair Oak, SO50 7DZ.

This site has a long history with multiple planning applications. It is understood a number of ecological appraisals were carried out between 2009 and 2017. In 2017 an Updated Ecological Appraisal was carried out by The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) (2017). Planning permission was granted in 2018 for a hybrid application of residential and office buildings. The northwestern part of site has previously been constructed but due to changes in the proposed site plans in the eastern portion, this was proposed as a new application for this area, and an Ecology Statement was provided by Peach Ecology in 2018, (Peach Ecology, 2018a) and further updated in 2020 (Peach Ecology, 2020).

The proposed plans for the development have again been altered and residential dwellings will no longer be part of the development. Rather, the proposed plans are now for an industrial development with associated parking and landscaping (**Appendices 1 & 2**). The area of impact is similar to the previous assessed proposed development, but the site design within the area of impact has changed from previously assessed designs.

The purpose of this Ecological Statement is to reassess the current proposed plans against the baseline conditions, from the previous ecological work and an updating field assessment, and provide recommendations for any changes in mitigation, compensation or enhancements.

### **Baseline Conditions (Previous Reports)**

The following information is based on the findings of the previous reports (EDP, 2017; Peach Ecology, 2018a; Peach Ecology, 2020). The 2017 survey encompassed a larger site including a large area at the northwest, which has since been constructed and is no longer within the current site boundary.

## Designated Sites

The River Itchen SAC is located 3.17km to the west of the site but was assessed as not being at risk of adverse impacts from the proposed development.

There are 21 non-statutory Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC) within 2km of the site, of which two are within close proximity of the site. Knowle Lane Open Space SINC is located 0.01km to the west and is a small amenity grassland and scrub area with structural diversity. Land at Knowle Lane, Fair Oak SINC is within the application site and to the southeast of the area of impact. It has a pond, purple moor grass and rush pastures (priority habitats), and excellent range of grassland with acid/neutral indicators.

It is understood measures have been included in the previous schemes and in the current proposed plans to protect the SINC. Under the granted planning permission, measures were included in a CEMP and a surface water drainage strategy was developed to address potential run-off during site operation, which included storage tanks, and new ponds with wetland habitat to hold run-off (which were previously constructed along the northern boundary). A 15m buffer area has been included between the area of impact and the SINC (where the attenuation basin has been proposed).

The SINC is being enhanced and an Updated Ecological Enhancement & Management report was produced (Ecosupport Ltd, 2022), which updates the previous management plan reports (EDP, 2010) and Peach Ecology (2018b).

## Habitats

Throughout all the ecology reports, the habitats within the area have been highly disturbed, with habitats in the area of development comprising bare/disturbed ground or hardstanding of negligible value, with some boundary habitats of grassland, tall ruderal/scattered scrub and a seasonally wet ditch considered to be of site value. However, boundary habitats including hedgerows and treelines were listed as local value. It was considered however, that with protection of these areas with tree protection fencing and signage, there would be no adverse impacts.

As part of the previous permission, a pond feature (comprising two separate ponds connected by a ditch) were constructed in late 2018 along the northern boundary of the site. Please note however, this is no longer present (see **Updated Field Survey**).

## Protected Species

- Bats – Many trees were identified with bat potential in 2016, three of which are within the current site boundary. The site was considered likely to be of no more than local importance to roosting, foraging and commuting bats
- Badgers – Some badger activity has been recorded throughout various surveys over the years, although the 2017 report concluded activity was decreasing (EDP, 2017). No setts were ever noted within the existing site boundary however.
- Birds – Potential bird breeding habitat was identified in hedgerows, trees, and scrub, but considered to be unlikely above Site value.

- GCN – An eDNA test was carried out on the pond in the SINC in 2018 with negative results and therefore it was considered unlikely GCN were present.
- Hedgehog – The boundary features were identified as good foraging habitat for Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*) but considered retention of these features would retain this.
- Invasive Species – A small stand of Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) was recorded in 2015, but it is understood treatment works were undertaken and this was no longer present in the 2017 or more recent assessments.
- Reptiles – In 2017, it was considered the habitats in area of impact had limited potential for supporting reptiles and therefore the habitats to be impacted would not support reptiles.

### **Updated Field Survey**

An updated field survey of the site was carried out on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023 by Darla Brown BSc (Hons), an experienced Project Ecologist with Ecosupport Ltd. and assisted by Ollie Silvester, Assistant Ecologist with Ecosupport Ltd. The site area was reassessed for its habitats, potential to support protected species and potential impacts of the updated site plans.

### **Habitats**

The habitats were considered to be largely similar to the previous findings. The main differences found were the presence of the ditch along the north-eastern area of site and the constructed pond in the eastern portion of site, which have been constructed since the previous ecology reports. Protective fencing was present on site to retain the features of importance.

- Hard Standing & Bare Ground (**Figs 1 & 2**) - The majority of the site was still comprised of hard standing and bare ground. Construction materials are present in some areas.
- Line of Trees (**Fig 3**) – A mature tree line is still present along the north-eastern boundary.
- Ditch (**Fig 4**) – A ditch containing water is present on the north-eastern area of the site near the boundary. It is understood this area was previously comprised of the pond and ditch feature and is now only a ditch, which will be retained in the existing plans, leading into the attenuation basin as part of the drainage strategy. Drooping Sedge (*Carex pendula*), Wild Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) and other reeds was present around the edges of the ditch.
- Pond (**Fig 5**) – The attenuation pond has been constructed and was present in the eastern portion of the site adjacent the SINC. It was noted to be fairly empty at the time with water only in the two deepest sections of the pond. Drooping Sedge, Wild Teasel and other reeds were also noted to be present around the edges.
- Grassland – There were some patchy areas of grassland near the ditch and pond. This was noted to be in very poor condition and sparse. Species included Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), Buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.), Greater Plantain (*Plantago major*), Bristly Oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides*), Dock (*Rumex* sp.) Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale* agg.), Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Spear Thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and mosses.

## Protected Species

- Badgers – Evidence of mammal tracks were present around the ditch and connecting to the field to the north of site. Some potential mammal holes were previously identified within the SINC to the east (Ecosupport, 2022). However, no potential setts were found within 30m of the area of impact.
- Bats – As noted in previous assessments, a number of PRFs were identified within the retained tree line, particularly in Oak (*Quercus* sp.) trees and some Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). PRFs mostly comprised loose bark, as well as a couple knot holes and vine coverage.
- Birds – A bird nest was noted in the mature tree line. The retained boundary trees and shrubs are suitable nesting habitat, but there is no potential breeding habitat within the area of impact.
- GCN – The pond within the site has very little water and no aquatic vegetation currently and would be unsuitable for GCN.
- Reptiles – The grassland is sparse and not considered to be suitable for reptiles within the area of impact.
- Other species – A woven grass nest was identified along the northern boundary of the site within area to be retained (**Figs 6**). It was found on the ground in the ditch near water and in poor condition due to wet conditions. Species could not be firmly identified due to its condition but is considered it could be a non-breeding Harvest Mouse (*Micromys minutus*) nest, which is a priority species. It is not considered any further effort is required, as this location is in a retained boundary that will be protected and enhanced in the development and there is no potential suitable habitat for any protected species or species of conservation concern within the area of impact. With the enhancements in this site and the adjacent SINC, any potential Harvest Mice present will likely highly benefit from the enhancements.

## Site Photos

**Fig 1.** Hardstanding area



**Fig 2.** Bare ground over majority of site



**Fig 3.** Line of trees on northeastern boundary



**Fig 4.** Ditch along northeastern boundary



**Fig 5.** Attenuation pond along eastern portion adjacent SINC



**Fig 6.** Northern boundary ditch, location of woven nest found at bottom of ditch near water



### **Updated Assessment & Recommendations**

Overall, the assessment of the site is considered to be similar to what has been assessed previously, with all habitats of value within the retained boundary areas currently. The following measures will be undertaken as previously recommended:

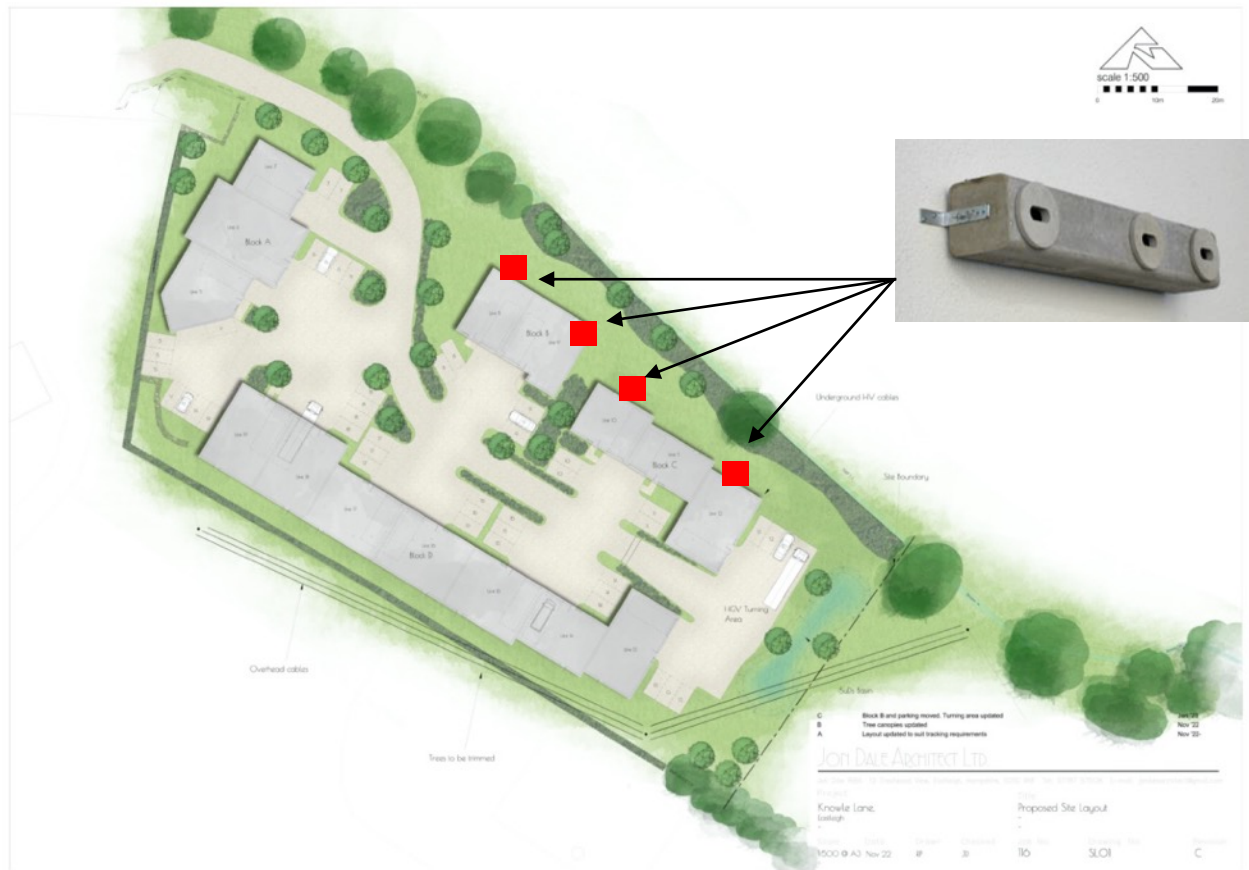
- **Protection of boundaries** – The boundary habitats will continue to be protected with suitable protective tree fencing, as recommended in the previous reports. The boundary protection fencing was already erected at the time of survey and will be maintained. This will ensure the protection of the adjacent SINC, habitats of importance and the majority of protected species.
- **Protection of SINC during construction** – A prior Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) was created as part of the previous proposed development. It is expected that this will be conditioned to be updated under the current planning application, if granted. The CEMP will ensure protection of the SINC and retained habitats of value during construction.

- **Protection of SINC during operation** – As previously proposed, the drainage strategy will ensure run-off is prevented from entering the SINC by diverting it into the drainage system with the attenuation pond and ditches. In addition, to divert any potential recreational pressure from the SINC, the area near the attenuation pond will be enhanced with a small picnic area and rubbish bins for industrial workers to have an area to enjoy. This was previously detailed in the updated SINC enhancement report (Ecosupport, 2022).
- **GCN** – It is noted that the eDNA survey on the SINC pond is now out of date. However, there is no suitable terrestrial habitat to be impacted within the site and based on the previous negative results and lack of nearby records, highly unlikely they are nearby. Therefore, it is not considered GCN are likely.
- **Bats** – The previous site design ensured no external lighting to be used along the southern boundary. In the updated site plan, no external lighting will be used on the southern aspect of Block D (along the new proposed hedge/thicket planting) to maintain bat foraging and commuting corridors.

Existing proposed enhancements are considered suitable within the site. These include:

- Habitat creation and enhancement (as shown in **Appendix 2**):
  - Attenuation basin and ditch (already constructed, provide a suitable water feature to enhance biodiversity within the landscape)
  - Hedge and tree planting along entrance into the site (including at least 10 native trees within the site as previously recommended)
  - Native hedge/thicket planting along southern boundary
  - Species-rich grassland areas with relaxed mowing regime, as shown in the landscape planting plan
- Four Schwegler triple-cavity swift boxes, to be erected under the eaves or incorporated into the fabric of the buildings and installed away from windows. New positions have been recommended in **Fig 8** in the new proposed design, on the northern side of the buildings where they won't receive full sun and are adjacent retained habitat area. An alternative design (with at least 400cm<sup>2</sup> floor space) may be used, should these boxes be unavailable.
- As noted in previous reports, standing dead wood within the retained tree line where safe to do so. This can provide potential habitat for invertebrates, bats, birds and foraging opportunities for various species.

**Figure 8.** Locations for swift boxes to be installed



## **Conclusion**

Overall, the conditions of the site are considered to be similar to previous reports with similar value of the habitats within the site. An updated assessment has been made on the ecology within the site and recommendations have been updated within this Ecological Statement. It is considered with the implementation of these recommendations, the development will not result in any adverse impacts on features of ecological value.

Yours sincerely,



Darrelle Moffat  
Project Ecologist

## References

Ecosupport Ltd (2022). *Updated Ecological Enhancement & Management Knowle Lane SINC*. Date of Issue: December 2022.

The Environment Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP) (2017). *Land at Knowle Lane, Fair Oak, Update Ecological Appraisal*. Date of Issue May 2017.

Peach Ecology (2018a). *Land East of Knowle Lane, Fair Oak, SO50 7DZ Ecology Statement*. Date of Issue 4<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

Peach Ecology (2018b). *Land East of Knowle Lane, Fair Oak, SO50 7DZ SINC Habitat Restoration, Management Strategy for Discharge of Condition 28 of Planning Application Reference F/17/806/40*. Date of Issue 28<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

Peach Ecology (2020). *Land East of Knowle Lane, Fair Oak, SO50 7DZ Ecology Statement*. Date of Issue 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

Appendix 1. Proposed site layout



Appendix 2. Proposed Landscape Plan

