

F/24/96817 Stoke Park Farm (Rowley Green Meadow), Stoke Common Road, Eastleigh, SO50 6DW

Excavation of seven new wildlife ponds. Associated habitat creation - hedgerow and tree planting. Stock fence along field boundary.

Thank you for consulting Ecology, my observations are as follows:

Background

The proposed location is a field parcel in the northeast corner of Stoke Park Farm. The site is a former dairy farm and is owned and managed by Eastleigh Borough Council. The whole of the Stoke Park Farm holding is covered by a Section 33 agreement with other LPAs (and agreed with Natural England) which allows the sale of nutrient credits from the land. The proposals presented are not contrary to the stipulated land uses within the nutrient agreement. The Government has produced detailed guidance on “stacking” environmental benefits on existing nutrient sites.

The Newt Conservation Partnership (NCP) are working to deliver strategic habitat creation projects for great-crested newts as part of the Hampshire District Level Licensing scheme administered by Naturespace. Eastleigh Borough Council is a signatory to this scheme (Organisational licence WML-OR112).

Ecological Baseline.

The application site is comprised of modified grassland, previously grazed by dairy cattle. As is typical of habitat of this nature it has very low species diversity and is generally considered to be of low intrinsic ecological value. The broader field parcel that will be enhanced as part of the wider project is bounded on the northeast and northwest by hedgerows with some standard trees and the Bow Lake stream corridor forms the southern boundary. All of the boundary features are likely to have raised interest compared to the rest of the site and all features will be retained and some enhanced.

There are no statutorily or non-statutorily designated sites for nature conservation on the application site itself. The Bow Lake Stream is a tributary of the River Itchen to which it joins downstream of the fish farm located immediately west of the application site. There are a number of SINC's in proximity to the application but there are no anticipated impacts upon any of them.

In terms of protected species, the limited nature of the proposals (confined to 1.6ha of pond creation and habitat enhancement) within species poor, modified grassland means there are no potential impacts. For this reason, no detailed Phase 2 surveys were required or undertaken.

The wider site boundary features (hedgerows, standard trees and the Bow Lake Stream corridor) are likely to be of raised interest for breeding birds and potentially reptiles. Dormice may also be present in the wider landscape and could be using the boundary features. Given that the Bow Lake Stream is a tributary of the Itchen it is probable that otters occasionally move along the stream corridor. There is no suitable habitat for water voles along this particular stretch on the stream. All boundary features are to be retained and enhanced.

Mitigation

The site is bounded by the Bow Lake Stream and therefore there is hydrological connectivity with the River Itchen SAC that lies downstream to the west of the application site. There are potential impacts in terms of pollution events and/or changes to hydrology and therefore a Shadow Habitats Regulations Assessment has been provided. There are no direct impacts to the SSSI or SAC.

The Shadow HRA concludes that there will be no likely significant effects as a result of the project due to increased siltation or runoff during construction (and immediately post construction) provided the construction Principles outlined in the D&A statement are implemented. No works are proposed within the floodplain and no spoil will be spread within the floodplain which is identified within the Flood Risk Assessment. I support these conclusions.

In addition, a precautionary mitigation statement for protected species during construction activities is provided in the "NCP - Protected Species method statement".

Enhancement

The project is intended to deliver significant habitat enhancement in the form of up to seven ponds and associated terrestrial habitat enhancement in the form of grassland, additional hedge planting and tree planting. This habitat creation has benefits far beyond just great-crested newts. While the cleanwater ponds are intended as strategic mitigation for Great-crested newts, they will also provide excellent habitat for wider range of invertebrates, amphibians and plants.

An 25 year management and monitoring plan for the ponds and associated terrestrial habitat will be agreed with EBC upon granting of planning permission.

Conclusion.

In summary, I have no objection and fully support this biodiversity enhancement project which is supported by the Environment Act (2021), the NPPF (2023) and EBC Local Plan policy DM11.

Paul Howe MCIEEM

Ecologist

Date 14/02/24