

Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA)
Screening Matrix and Appropriate Assessment Statement

PLEASE NOTE: Undertaking the HRA process is the responsibility of the decision maker as the Competent Authority for the purpose of the Habitats Regulations. However, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the Competent Authority with the information that they require for this purpose.

HRA drafting date:	29 April 2024
HRA completion date:	4 June 2024
Application reference:	F/24/96817
Application address:	Stoke Park Farm (Rowley Green Meadow), Stoke Common Road, Eastleigh, SO50 6DW
Application description:	Excavation of seven new wildlife ponds. Associated habitat creation - hedgerow and tree planting. Stock fence along field boundary (total maximum surface area approximately 3,210 metres ²) with associated native tree and hedge planting to support Eastleigh Borough Council's great crested newt (GCN) Organisational Licence (WML-OR112). The purpose is to increase habitat for GCN on the site and contribute to the scheme's landscape scale conservation strategy. Spoil will be used within Rowley Green Meadow
Lead Planning Officer:	Nicholas Parker
Case Officer:	Dawn Errington
Please note that all references in this assessment to the 'Habitats Regulations' refer to The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.	

Stage 1 - details of the plan or project	
European site potentially impacted by planning application, plan or project:	River Itchen Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and SSSI
Is the planning application directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (if yes, Applicant should have provided details)?	No. The development involves the construction of ponds with landscaping, which is neither connected to nor necessary to the management of any European site.
Are there any other projects or plans that together with the planning application being assessed could affect the site (Applicant to provide details to allow an 'in combination' effect to be assessed)?	Yes, there is a current application for Use of agricultural land as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) for recreational purposes, with associated access, car parking, paths, landscaping, infrastructure and other works (ref F/23/95844)

Stage 2 - HRA screening assessment
Screening under Regulation 63(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations – The Applicant to provide evidence so that a judgement can be made as to whether there could be any potential significant impacts of the development on the integrity of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar.

The applicant has provided Information to Inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment with the planning application:

European site qualifying features and conservation objectives:

River Itchen Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site

Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranuncion fluitantis* and *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation

The Itchen is a classic example of a sub-type 1 chalk river. The river is dominated throughout by aquatic *Ranunculus* spp. The headwaters contain pond water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus*, while two *Ranunculus* species occur further downstream: stream water-crowfoot *R. penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans*, a species especially characteristic of calcium-rich rivers, and river water-crowfoot *R. fluitans*.

Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site

Southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*

Strong populations of southern damselfly occur here, estimated to be in the hundreds of individuals. The site in central southern England represents one of the major population centres in the UK. It also represents a population in a managed chalk-river flood plain, an unusual habitat for this species in the UK, rather than on heathland.

Bullhead *Cottus gobio*

The Itchen is a classic chalk river that supports high densities of bullhead throughout much of its length. The river provides good water quality, extensive beds of submerged plants that act as a refuge for the species, and coarse sediments that are vital for spawning and juvenile development.

Annex II species present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for site selection

White-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*

Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*

Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Conservation objectives

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Ecological characteristics associated with the features of the European site:

The Itchen typifies the classic chalk river and shows a greater uniformity in physical characteristics along its entire length than other rivers of this type. Since the river is mainly spring-fed, there is only a narrow range of seasonal variation in physical and chemical characteristics. The water is of high quality, being naturally base-rich and of great clarity; and its temperature is relatively constant, with dissolved oxygen levels at or near saturation.

The river's vegetation is dominated by higher plants, and the aquatic flora is exceptionally species rich with many of the typical chalk stream plants present in abundance.

The proposal site is located within the River Itchen operational catchment in an area of farmland which is connected to field and roadside drains. These drains run with a flow via Bow Lake (a

main river which is a tributary of the River Itchen) in the direction of the SAC before eventually joining it approximately 740m from the proposal site.

The main threats to the River Itchen SAC originating from outside of the SAC bounds are identified as “pollution to groundwater (point sources and diffuse sources)” and “human induced changes in hydraulic conditions”.

Sediment pollution can smother important river habitats such as fish spawning habitats and resulting in changes to water chemistry, which is potentially damaging to the designated features of the SAC. Pollution from fuels and other chemicals can have a variety of effects on fresh water ecology and can lead to death of fish and invertebrates.

Ecological survey results for the application site:

An Ecological Assessment (Newt Conservation Partnership ref PP-12767845 dated January 2024) has been submitted.

Surveys undertaken at the site included

- amphibians (negative result for GCN and other amphibians),
- badger (negative result);
- bats (likely foraging site);
- birds (grassland in the application area is likely be used for foraging by Barn owl *Tyto alba* and possibly other Schedule 1 bird species. It could also be used by ground nesting bird species, with relatively recent cessation of the dairy farming operation);
- fish (Bow Lake Stream does not intersect the application area but is approximately 25m away at the nearest point);
- hazel dormouse (The application site contains no suitable habitat);
- hedgehog (The application site itself provides no suitable hedgehog habitat);
- Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) - No INNS were recorded during a walkover of the application site in May or July 2023. Outside the application area, Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* was noted on a section of the Bow Lake to the south-west of the application area;
- Invertebrates (There is no suitable habitat for Stag beetle, although there is suitable habitat nearby in Stoke Park Farm. There is no suitable habitat for Southern damselfly in the application site or in the wider Stoke Park Farm site);
- Otter (There are 18 records within 2km for Otter *Lutra lutra*, all relating to the River Itchen or Itchen Navigation. The riparian habitat along the Bow Lake stream is quite limited and is unlikely to be suitable for resting places. The section bordering Rowley Green Meadow was surveyed in May 2023 and no spraints, footprints or likely resting places were found. Otter occasionally visit the Bow Lake Fish Farm (Pers. comm. P. Haughton July 2023). It is very likely that Otter use the Bow Lake stream for movement and dispersal within the wider area.);
- Reptiles (The improved grassland habitat in the application site was used intensively for dairy farming until November 2021 and appears to be currently of low to moderate suitability for supporting reptiles. The surrounding hedges and riparian woodland habitats do provide suitable cover for reptiles);
- Water Vole (There is currently no suitable habitat for Water vole within the application area);

The identified ways in which the Qualifying Features of the European site could be affected by the proposal:

Site within 740m to east at closest point, within Impact Zone (for all planning applications). Potential route for increased sediment to enter the Bow Lake (which eventually drains to the River Itchen) via the drain network during pond construction phase. Blocking drains and creating ponds within Rowley Green Meadow may reduce sediment and nutrient pollutant inputs to the Bow Lake over time.

Would the proposal lead to a likely significant effect on European site integrity? YES

(If yes, continue to Stage 3).

Stage 3 - Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment under Regulation 63(1) - if there are any potential significant impacts, the applicant must provide evidence showing avoidance and/or mitigation measures to allow an Assessment to be made. The Applicant must also provide details which demonstrate any long term management, maintenance and funding of any solution.

The proposal has the potential to create significant impacts on the water quality of surface water features during the temporary phase of construction

Temporary impacts

Pollution control measures will avoid pollutants or sediments entering the Bow Lake. Standard pollution prevention will be implemented during the construction phase to mitigate any impacts due to spillages etc. Measures to be secured via contractor's Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) condition. A draft CEMP has been submitted (*Newt Conservation Partnership, April 2024*). The works will take approximately 4-6 weeks.

In addition, sediment control is an important feature of the construction phase on this site and keeping sediment at source; preventing it entering water courses is essential during these works. In order to ensure this can be achieved the following will be implemented during the construction phase:

- Install physical barriers around earthwork areas as detailed in the CEMP. This will be undertaken by creating silt traps and/or silt fencing, designed to slow overland flow, ensure sediments cannot enter the water course, and to protect retained habitat as much as possible.
- Any areas of surface water ponding/pooling within work compounds/enclosures to be contained and managed
- Excavations should not take place on days with heavy rainfall forecasted or very dry days that would emit significant dust from the site.
- Storage and refuelling areas within existing yard using best practice control measures
- Risk assessment for importing of INNS

Operational Impacts

Pollution control measures will avoid pollutants or sediments entering the Bow Lake. A 25-yr management plan (operated by Eastleigh Borough Council) will be in place to avoid harmful longer term impacts.

The new ponds will be surface and rain fed. The clay substrate will enable the water to be retained without the use of liners. The new ponds are small in size and located on lower ground so are unlikely to induce any significant changes to the hydrology of the wider area. Rainwater will be retained for longer before entering the Bow Lake stream. Blocking and partial removal of drains around the new ponds will also help to restore natural hydrological processes.

The Management Plan will be updated every five years by mutual agreement between NCP and EBC.

Stage 4 – Summary of the Appropriate Assessment (To be carried out by the Competent Authority (the local planning authority) in liaison with Natural England

In conclusion, the application could have a likely significant effect on the European protected Solent SPA, SAC and Ramsar sites in the absence of avoidance and mitigation measures. With the above mitigation measures in place secured by condition, it is considered SAC qualifying

features would not be adversely affected. It is therefore considered there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the European site alone or in-combination with other plans or projects. The authority has therefore concluded that any adverse effects arising from the proposal can be mitigated through a condition relating to the submitted Construction Environmental Management Plan and operational management plan. It can therefore be concluded that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the designated sites identified above. This represents the authorities Appropriate Assessment as Competent Authority in accordance with requirements under Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive and having due regard to its duties under Section 40(1) of the NERC Act 2006 to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Consideration of the Ramsar site/s is a matter of government policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (Jul 2021).