

Ecology Solutions Limited
Farncombe House
Farncombe Estate
Broadway
Worcestershire
WR12 7LJ

+44(0)1451 870767
info@ecologysolutions.co.uk
www.ecologysolutions.co.uk



7884: BICESTER MOTION (EXPERIENCE QUARTER)

COVER NOTE: BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT CALCULATOR

Introduction

1. Ecology Solutions have produced a Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculator (BIAC) for the outline planning proposals for the Experience Quarter using the Warwickshire BIAC tool, as is required by local planning policy. Noting the Experience Quarter proposals are envisaged to comprise the first phase of a wider masterplan, a further BIAC has been undertaken as an 'informative' for the wider Bicester Motion Masterplan.
2. The BIAC work has been undertaken through the Warwickshire calculator in order to ensure consistency with the BIACs submitted and approved in respect of the FAST proposals. This is considered the most appropriate approach as it allows Cherwell District Council's local ecologist to ascertain the changes to biodiversity for the wider Bicester Motion Masterplan as a whole (relative to the previous submission in support of FAST).
3. As for the FAST scheme, the Experience Quarter submission includes both the phase species calculations and the site wide calculations as part of this planning application. The Experience Quarter specific calculator indicated those proposals would result in net gain of +69.6 units. The indicative site wide calculator (including for FAST and Experience Quarter) indicates the masterplan as a whole would achieve a positive score of +104.6 units.
4. Notwithstanding that these BIACs have been produced, Ecology Solutions has significant reservations with the use of BIAC tools as the definitive mechanism in assessing the 'net biodiversity gain' achieved through development. Ecology Solutions does not consider the score generated by these calculators to be reflective of the true impact of a scheme. In this case, it is considered the score underrepresents the enhancements being provided.
5. These reservations were detailed in a previous BIAC Note submitted to Cherwell District Council's local ecologist as part of the FAST proposals. As such, and whilst these reservations remain relevant to assessment of the Experience Quarter Site (and indeed assessment of the wider Masterplan Area) they are not reiterated in full within this note.

6. Ecology Solutions have previously discussed its reservations with Cherwell District Council's local ecologist in both email correspondence and at meetings. It is understood to be a matter of agreement that, whilst BIAC are useful tools, professional judgment is essential in guiding appropriate and proportional ecological mitigation and enhancement.
7. This Cover Note and the accompanying BIAC should be considered alongside the Ecological Assessment produced in support of the Experience Quarter proposals. The Ecological Assessment provides a thorough evaluation of the Site's ecological value, as well as careful consideration of the impacts, mitigation and enhancement opportunities. It should be afforded significantly more weight than the BIAC produced for the proposals.

Case Specific Considerations for Experience Quarter Proposals

8. As expressed previously, Ecology Solutions considers BIAC tools fail to accurately assess changes in ecological value. This inaccuracy arises for a host of reasons, and ultimately reflects the relative simplicity of the tools. Such inaccuracies are further compounded by the fact that the Experience Quarter Site supports some atypical habitat types, a range of protected and notable species (the presence of which is not accounted for within calculators) and is afforded a designation as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) on account of specific habitat types being present.
9. The BIAC utilises 'multipliers' to alter the score generated for habitats enhanced or created under the proposals. These multipliers effectively serve to reduce the score (termed the *habitat biodiversity value* within the calculator) based on factors such as the difficulty of creating certain habitats or the time it takes for habitats to reach a certain condition. Some of these multipliers are set by the calculator and cannot be amended by the ecologist inputting the data and, as such, cannot be amended to reflect professional judgment of site specific considerations.
10. The shortfalls of most relevance to the wider Bicester Motion Site, and which were considered in detail within the previous BIAC Note issued as part of the FAST proposals, are summarised below:
 - That 'difficulty to creation' is a set multiplier that does not account for on site conditions such as adjacent habitat/soil conditions. Where conditions are suitable for creation, it follows that creation will be easier to achieve;
 - That the BIAC approach does not consider a reasonable non-development scenario;
 - That the BIAC approach fails to acknowledge that habitats in 'good' condition cannot be further enhanced; and
 - That the BIAC approach does not allow for consideration of local biodiversity objectives (such as Conservation Target Areas or Local Wildlife Site designations).
11. The Experience Quarter proposals also seek to bring forward extensive areas of Open Mosaic Habitat within the central airfield on Site. This airfield currently supports species poor and intensively mown grassland which is resultantly of limited ecological value. The implementation of localised habitat creation works, alongside the adoption of a dedicated management regime for this habitat will allow this grassland to support an enhanced structural and botanical mosaic post development. The neighbouring uses of wider site, such as racetracks and

occasional parking, will also provide passive management (i.e. disturbance) contributing to the maintenance of early successional habitats.

12. As well as delivering intrinsic habitat enhancements, these habitat creation and management measures would greatly enhance the functional value of this central airfield land, not least in respect of the Sites invertebrate assemblage. Whilst the value of Open Mosaic Habitat is recognised as 'High', with a distinctiveness score of '6' within the DEFRA metric (another widely used BIA tool), this habitat category is not included within the Warwickshire calculator used. On this basis, the habitat category of 'ephemeral/short perennial' has been chosen as a best fit category, with its distinctiveness modified to reflect that attributed within the DEFRA metric. This approach is deemed to best reflect (within the constraints of BIAC) the habitat delivery proposed as part of the Experience Quarter proposals.

Summary and Conclusion

13. Ecology Solutions have produced a Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculator for the outline planning proposals at Experience Quarter using the Warwickshire BIAC tool, as is required by local planning policy. Noting that the proposals are envisaged to comprise the first phase of a wider masterplan, an updated Masterplan BIAC has been undertaken as an 'informative' for a Visionary masterplan.
14. The Experience Quarter specific calculator indicated those proposals would result in net gain of +69.6 units. The indicative site wide calculator (including for FAST and Experience Quarter) indicates the masterplan as a whole, would achieve a positive score of +104.6 units.
15. The Experience Quarter proposals therefore align with the guiding principle of delivering a masterplan wide biodiversity net gain, as was initially proposed as part of the FAST submission.
16. As set out in this Note, Ecology Solutions has significant reservations with the use of BIAC tools as the definitive mechanism in assessing the 'net biodiversity gain' achieved through development. These tools are not an adequate replacement for professional judgement.
17. Notwithstanding these reservations, both the BIAC work and the Ecological Assessment work serve to demonstrate the Experience Quarter proposals can come forward in a manner which secure meaningful biodiversity net gains, in accordance with legislation and planning policy at all administrative levels.