**From:** Simon Taber [mailto:Simon.Taber@ecologysolutions.co.uk]
**Sent:** 29 March 2017 11:28
**To:** Matthew Parry; Bob Duxbury
**Cc:** Richard Cutler; Bruce Usher; Tim Goodwin; Karen Kemp Hall; Mike Neep
**Subject:** Bicester Gateway - Ecological Update 16/02586/OUT (Our ref: 7057)

Dear Matthew and Bob,

Further to recent discussions regarding Bicester Gateway, and your recent meeting with Richard, please find below a comprehensive update in relation to ecological matters.

As Richard made reference in his email following your planning meeting last week, please find attached two revised ‘Biodiversity Impact Assessment’ spreadsheets which accord to Phase 1A and Phase 1B of the scheme separately. As you will note, considering the calculations there will be a net gain in terms of the score for both of the sub-phases, if they were to be considered in isolation of one another. I trust that this is helpful. As a further enhancement, Phase 1B includes the retention and enhancement via instigation of an appropriate management regime of an area of scrub within the ownership of the applicant, which lies immediately to the south of Phase 1B (adjacent to Chesterton Bridge). I should note that the positive score for Phase 1B is not reliant on this area (i.e. if you were to omit this area, the score would not become negative); this is therefore being offered as an additional enhancement.

As noted previously, I should also highlight that the calculation / matrix does not incorporate or take into account other ecological mitigation and enhancement measures that will be delivered under the scheme – such as bat and bird boxes and swift bricks, which are to be secured by condition. On this basis, the benefits for the scheme are, in my professional judgement, likely to be greater than represented by the calculation alone. Moreover, it is very important to bear in mind that the ecological value of the site is very limited at present, as recognised in the detailed Ecological Assessment report that was submitted as part of the planning application and also as stated in the Screening Opinion (decision dated 1st September).

As Richard mentioned yesterday, we have been in touch with Tom Tew, the CEO of the Environment Bank, who have been developing the biodiversity matrix / offsetting approach that Warwickshire have adopted in this instance. We were keen to understand the assessment method further, and how it should ideally be applied in the context of planning applications. From our discussions, it was made clear that whilst this type of assessment is an innovative concept that can be used, in some circumstances such as for a site of low value (as with this site), it is more appropriate to rely upon the conventional ecological assessment methodology than applying the matrix approach (i.e. professional judgement). In order to be effective, Tom noted that this process should form an integral part of planning policy. As you will be aware, for Cherwell current planning policy does not make any particular reference to undertaking this type of assessment, presumably because it post-dates the adoption of the Local Plan. Moreover, at the present time it is understood that Cherwell does not have any potential off-site mitigation land which has been identified.

Tom agreed that the most important factor is that a holistic approach is adopted, whereby habitats and linear features can be offset against one another and which takes into account other material considerations such as new bat and bird boxes, the benefits of delivering habitats not currently present within a site (e.g. swales) resulting in an overall mosaic of features, and delivering long-term management with a focus on delivering biodiversity benefits – in essence, pragmatism is key.  As stated previously, in our professional ecological opinion, it may be concluded that the proposals will not only avoid significant adverse impacts to biodiversity, but will in fact deliver enhancements compared to the existing situation. On this basis, they comply fully with all relevant legislation and planning policy, and as such there would be no ecological grounds for refusal.

I have sought to discuss the above with David Lowe to seek agreement from him (in Louise Sherwell’s absence), but have not been able to speak with him to date. We will continue to try to speak to him, but I trust that the information outlined above provides reassurance that the development proposals will not result in adverse ecological impacts and that they comply fully with planning policy.

Kind regards,

Simon

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