

Jake Brown

Subject: <v9_SmartSaved/>
Categories: SmartSaved
SmartSaved: wbcopentlappsrv_U49_D8_N1879498

From: Gareth Ryman
Sent: 16 September 2020 12:26
To: Jake Brown <Jake.Brown@westberks.gov.uk>
Cc: Niko Grigoropoulos <Niko.Grigoropoulos1@westberks.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: 20/01238/OUTMAJ ecology response

Dear Niko

We have the following comments to make on this application regarding how the proposals and their probable effects on the biodiversity and the natural environment:

Summary: Insufficient regard has been given to the post works impacts on the existing retained habitats, it is our opinion that the current proposals are most likely going to lead to a gradual but significant decline in the quality of the habitats on site and a reduction in suitability for a number of protected species, caused by increased anthropogenic pressures on the site which have not even been considered let alone mitigated for with appropriate compensation measures. Additionally we have found a large number inconsistencies within the submitted documentation that have the potential to have an impact of the local natural environment, meaning that environmental impacts have not been considered by the Environmental Statement or at least not to the degree that they should have been as the various changes and alterations have been made to the hard infrastructure to be put into place. **Currently we recommend that on ecological and environmental grounds this application be refused unless our concerns can be addressed.**

1. Priority habitats:

- a. **Ancient woodland** – 15m buffer encroachment by the new highway embankment (leading to the stream culvert) at Barn Copse and Slockett's Copse, recreational use impacts have not been considered at all (this is expanded upon in point 12 of our response). As an example of one of the inconsistencies contained within the application submissions is the encroachment of the 15m buffer identified that is contrary to the submitted Planning Statement, Design and Access Statement, ES Vol. 1 Chapters 6 and 7 and the Green Infrastructure Parameter Plan which all state that a 15m buffer will be retained to all woodlands.
There are proposed sports pitches as part of the Park House school expansion which set to be placed next to Barn copse, the pitches are likely to require to have flood lighting that hasn't been included in the lighting assessment report (ES Vol. 3 Appendices F20). These flood lights would most likely have a detrimental effect on the Ancient woodland of Barn copse, with the disruption of nocturnal fauna such as bats and moths.
These types of inconsistencies are systemic through this application, and amount to a reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unnecessary impacts on biodiversity that could be solved if amended drawings and reports are submitted addressing our concerns before determination.
- b. **Rush pasture (including Purple Moor grass)** – We are not satisfied that the avoidance of the loss of some of this species and habitat has been explored sufficiently. If the new road were to loop around north of where the stream and purple moor grass habitat starts then there would be no loss of this habitat, this option has not been mentioned or explored, the

HRA derogation tests should have picked up on this. A reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unnecessary impacts on biodiversity that could be solved if the amended drawings and reports are submitted before determination.

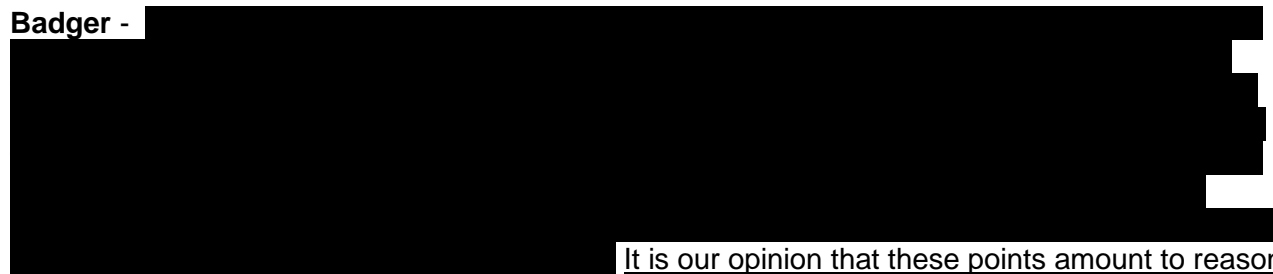
- c. **Ponds** – the 8 onsite ponds are likely to be degraded by the intensification of the site, the particular impacts will come in the form domestic dogs entering and exiting the ponds which will pough the banks and disturb plants this is likely to lead to a reduced biodiversity of the individual ponds overall. The aquatic invertebrate does not consider invertebrates in the ponds. Additionally dogs also sometimes have flea/tick treatments these if not washed off at home end up in waterbodies such as ponds, streams and rivers like what are on this site and are very effective at killing not only fleas and ticks but also aquatic invertebrates. These impacts have not been considered in the submitted documents and thus amount to reasons for refusal if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
 - d. **Riparian/fluvial habitats** – Currently the River Enborne and the onsite streams have not had their intrinsic values as stretches of water course valued with a quantitative output (only a generalised qualitative output has been given). Using [The Modular River Survey technique - MoRPh](#) (or a similar agreed suitable quantitative survey technique) would allow for quantitative gains for the flowing water bodies that are to be and likely to be effected by this development. Impacts from hard landscaping such as (but not limited to) culverts, bridges and increased hard standing near water courses could be offset on other parts of the impacted watercourse and then monitored as to the mitigations and compensations successes and areas needing improvement. It is therefore our opinion that currently the unquantified impact is likely to negatively affect this habitat as such amounts to a reason for refusal on the grounds of insufficient information and consideration in the submitted documents that could be solved if the surveys can be completed and the subsequent report submitted before determination of this application.
 - e. **Secondary woodland/Lowland mixed deciduous woodland** – It is difficult to quantify the likely impacts on this habitat, what is likely to happen is that the compensatory habitats and associated planting will enhance the retained woodlands quality and connectivity but there is an currently unquantified recreational disturbance impact likely to impact this habitat as such amounts to in our opinion amount to a reason for refusal on the grounds of insufficient information and consideration in the submitted documents if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
 - f. **Hedgerows** – There are a number of inconsistencies in the submitted details of which hedgerows are to be retained, enhanced, the status of the quality of individual hedgerows and which hedgerows are to be installed as part of the proposals for this development application (see point 6 - Dormice for details of some examples of the inconsistencies), these form in our opinion a reason for refusal on the grounds of insufficient information if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
 - g. **Woodpasture and Parkland BAP Priority Habitat (England)** - It is difficult to quantify the likely impacts on this habitat, what is likely to happen is that the compensatory habitats and associated planting will enhance the retained wood pasture's quality and connectivity but there is an currently unquantified recreational disturbance impact likely to impact this habitat as such amounts to in our opinion amount to a reason for refusal on the grounds of insufficient information and consideration in the submitted documents if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
2. **Bats** – There are clear contradictions and inconsistencies that threaten protected bat species, threats that haven't been fully taken into account in the submitted documentation, for example (one of many examples) ES Vol. 1 Main Text - Chapter 6 (January 2020 ref: 2017.013.032a) Page 6-22 'Bats' – states that no trees with confirmed bat roosts are to be lost yet then states trees T127 and T130 - which do have confirmed bat roosts according to appendix F7 - are to be removed or pollarded as per arboricultural assessment. This section then goes on to consider that the removal of those trees do not form part of the proposals, but they are as set out in the arboricultural

assessment. Also noted on page 6-30 that no roosting trees are to be removed yet arboricultural assessment says otherwise. Note - Appendix G7 advises that tree works are to be in accordance with the AIA. It is our opinion that these points amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified impacts on biodiversity and inconsistencies in the submitted leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, in our opinion it will be difficult to find acceptable compensation for the loss of veteran and mature trees that currently are also being used as bat roosts.

3. **Reptiles** - The current partial land use of pheasant rearing is likely to be having a negative effect on the reptile population and the removal of this industry is likely to have a positive impact on reptile populations onsite but isn't probably enough of a positive effect to offset the negative impacts of increased predation of reptiles by domestic cats and dogs alone even with the proposed reptile mitigation areas. It is our opinion that these points amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application..
4. **Skylark and lapwing** – It is our opinion that not enough consideration has been given to the increased recreational disturbance by domestic dogs with the change in land use from arable to a urban fringe recreational country park and that this has led to an oversight in the likelihood of success in the compensatory habitat too be provided. It is our recommendation that in addition to the proposed compensatory measures for skylark (and subsequently lapwing) delivered onsite that offsite provisioned habitats be a part of what must be delivered to guarantee that no long-term negative effects on skylarks arise from this development, if the development comes into fruition. We also note that the European Commission Management plan for [skylark](#) point - Atmospheric pollution (6.1) "In certain breeding habitats, e.g. heaths and dunes, deposition of nutrients, particularly nitrogen compounds, can lead to unfavourable changes in vegetation structure.". We are of the opinion that there is a possibility of there being a currently unquantified cumulative negative effect skylark habitat locally because of the intensification of the site and surrounding areas with more car trips being taken around and through the site. We do not dispute the findings of the submitted Breeding bird survey report (ES Vol.3 Appendices F4) but **we do dispute** the likelihood of the success of maintaining the same level and quality of breeding habitat for skylark and lapwing. An alternative to delivering off site mitigation would to look at delivering additional breeding habitat for skylark and lapwing through extensive green/brown roofs (including [small water bodies](#), these water bodies would help alleviate the impacts discussed in point 1.c.) onsite that have no access for the public only maintenance teams, these additional compensation measures would need to be agreed before determination of this application because they will need to be likely delivered through and maintained through Section 106 agreements. It is our opinion that these points amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified impacts on biodiversity and inconsistencies in the submitted leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application..
5. **Otter** – It is our opinion that not enough consideration has been given to recreational disturbance on otters using the River Enborne, particularly with the ambiguity surrounding the path depicted on the illustrative layout plan but not shown or considered in any of the other submitted documents. The impacts on otter are likely to significant due to the increased intensification of the site increasing the likelihood of disturbance both during construction and post construction, these disturbances are likely to affect both holts, feeding opportunities, haul out/feeding areas and potentially commuting along the river Enborne. It is our opinion that this point amounts to reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
6. **Dormice** – In addition to the mitigation measures listed in section 5.2 of the submitted Dormouse Presence/Likely Absence Survey report (ES Vol.3 Appendices F10), we require that the habitat (woodland and hedgerows) where the last sightings of dormice have been listed have the existing woodlands and hedgerows better connected by hedgerows with dormouse friendly planting and management of new and retained habitats at the forefront. We are not confident in the submissions

to date including which hedgerows are to be retained. We cite and make the following observations; ES Vol. 3 - Appendix F21 (February 2020 ref: A070660-24 Rev 6) Section 3.2.1 advises that hedgerows A and E are considered important under the hedgerow regulations whereas ES Vol. 1 Chapter 6, Section 6.4.2 advises that it is hedgerows A and F, and Page 6-28 'Species-Rich Hedgerows' – states that c.521m of hedgerow is to be removed. ES Vol. 3 Appendix F10 advises that a total length of 501m of hedgerow will be lost, ES Vol. 3 - Appendix F10 (February 2019 ref: A070660-24 Rev 3) Section 5.1 advises that portions of hedgerows G and F are to be removed, neither of which are considered as important under the Hedgerow Regulations. However, ES Vol. 1 Chapter 6, Section 6.4.2 advises that Hedgerow F is considered important under the Hedgerow Regulations. ES Vol. 3 Appendices F1 and F18 advise that hedgerows A and E are considered as important under the Hedgerow Regulations. There have been updates in the best practice guidelines for surveying for dormice since the majority of the dormouse survey effort was undertaken and as such we are not confident that dormice are not present on the site and as such combined with the likely increased anthropogenic pressures on the dormice (such as predation by domestic cats and dogs) that have not been considered with some of the latest dormouse sightings being in the North of the site near to where a large number of the new dwellings are planned to be placed is unacceptable and our opinion amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified impacts on biodiversity and inconsistencies in the submitted documents leading to sufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.

7. **Badger -**



It is our opinion that these points amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.

8. **Barn Owl** – The proposals are set to remove trees identified as barn owl roosts but we note the following from 2 observations of the submitted documentation; section 4.8.2 notes that tree T127 is confirmed as a potential nesting sites for barn owls and recognises that the submitted arboricultural assessment recommends felling that tree and if felled would require further surveys and recommendations to inform that work. Appendix G7 advises that tree works are to be undertaken in accordance with the AIA. Therefore that tree is proposed to be felled and so the recommendations are required now. Section 4.8.2 notes that in the event that tree T34 (confirmed Barn Owl nest) is removed update surveys, appropriate avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures, will be required. Tree T34 is proposed to be removed in the submitted AIA and Strategic Landscape and Green Infrastructure Plan. Appendix G7 advises that tree works are to be undertaken in accordance with the AIA. Therefore tree T34 is to be felled and update surveys, appropriate avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures, are required. It is our opinion that these points amount to a reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on this protected species, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.
9. **Air quality** – The increased air quality impacts have not been considered fully in the submitted documents, there is likely to be a currently unquantified cumulative negative effect on local priority habitats on the site including ancient woodlands because of the intensification of the site and surrounding areas with more car trips being taken around and through the site. We also have our doubts that the air quality impacts on Greenham common have been fully examined. It is our opinion that these points amount to reasons for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to

insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on Greenham common and the onsite Priority habitats, if our concerns are not addressed before determination of this application.

10. **Invasive species** - Invasive species control should be tackled on a catchment basis and as such it is expected that any scheme for this will need to manage/remove non-native plants from the site but also pay into a Kennet catchment wide initiative to control/remove invasive species (plants and fauna) from the catchment. The inclusion in such a scheme will need to be agreed in principle before determination of this application as it is likely to be funded by section 106 agreements.
11. **Water quality** – The effects on water quality particularly at the point where the proposed road that traverses the proposed country park crossing the stream and terrestrial habitats will need to be assessed and quantified as the proposed scheme is likely to have a detrimental effect on these through a drop in water quality entering the priority habitats (Rush pasture and Riparian/fluvial habitats) in this area of the site. In addition to the comments about SuDS made in point 1.a. of our response, we also state that the water quality been given to the trees will be of a lesser standard having further negative impacts on the ancient woodlands. It is our opinion that these points make for a reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable impacts on biodiversity that could be solved if the amended reports and drawings are submitted before determination.
12. **Net gain for biodiversity** - We require that any development on this site deliver a positive net gain for biodiversity and currently we are of the opinion that the proposals only deal with the habitat loss but do not take into account the degradation of the retained existing habitats which because of the change of land use, the increased access across the site to members of the public for recreational purposes and general intensification of the site. It is our opinion that these points amount to a reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on the retained habitats and as such the appropriate levels of compensation to be calculated and delivered, these issues could be solved if the amended drawings and reports are submitted before determination.
13. **Water vole** - Water vole if absent from the site are likely to be absent due to current or historic American mink presence and as such we direct the reader towards point 10 above. Once if it is felt that mink numbers are under control locally and across the catchment areas that do not become recolonised by water vole naturally could be subject to reintroduction programs if the habitat is suitable in that location.
14. **Great crested newts** - We accept that great crested newts (GCN) are likely absent from the site, and that the mitigation measures that will be needed to safe guard reptiles are likely to give some safeguards for GCN. It may be possible for the ponds if they are being managed correctly and disturbance of the ponds at an acceptable level for the ponds become part the District's District licencing scheme receiving newts from other sites if the amphibians found at both sites are found to be free of chytrid fungus pathogens.
15. **White claw crayfish** - We accept that White claw crayfish are likely absent from the site due to the presence of signal crayfish and the likely presence of the associated pathogen (*Aphanomyces astaci*) that signal crayfish are known carry, in the future if effective control measures are found for signal crayfish and/or the associated pathogen and if it is felt that signal crayfish numbers are under control locally and across the catchment areas that do not become recolonised by White claw crayfish naturally these waterbodies could be suitable for reintroduction programs if the habitat is suitable at that location.
16. **Designated sites** – We agree with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) response to this application that insufficient information has been submitted us on how the recreational impact on Greenham and Crookham Commons SSSI is to be mitigated for. It is our opinion that this amounts to a reason for refusal on the grounds of an unacceptable unquantified potentially negative impacts on biodiversity in the submitted proposals leading to insufficient information to fully understand the impacts on Greenham common SSSI, this could be solved if amended reports addressing our concerns are submitted before determination.

Kind regards

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