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EAST CHICKERELL – CHICK 2 ALLOCATION

MEETING NOTE

Attendees:

John Stobart (Natural England [NE]) **JS**
Dominic Farmer (Ecology Solutions) **DF**
Jenni Morgan (Ecology Solutions) **JM**

Date of meeting: 26th August 2015

Purpose of meeting

1. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss NE's pre-application advice and scoping opinion on the emerging layout of the site, in particular the potential effects of the layout on known populations of Great Crested Newts (GCN) within the Crookhill Brick Pits SSSI / SAC and the Bennetts Water Gardens in proximity to the site, and on the 'ecological corridor' along the southern boundary of the site.

Discussion

2. JS stated that there were two main areas of concern from the proposed development, these being the impacts on GCN and the effects of the development on green corridors.

3. JS set out that there are green corridors existing either side of the electricity substation (with the development currently designed well to preserve the corridor on its eastern edge). JS also referred to another corridor along the southern boundary of the site (linking Radipole Lake and The Fleet) and stated that the function of the green corridor should be retained. For example if losses to this corridor need to occur, this could be offset through enhancements to the retained section of the corridor.

4. JS said that there is a fairly large population of GCN within the water gardens adjacent to the site, which may be linked to the population within the Crookhill Brick Pits SSSI / SAC. However, DF pointed out that these two areas are now separated by the B3157 link road (Chickerell Road), and JS acknowledged that this may mean there are now two separate populations of GCN.

5. Given the above, JS did not see the main road through the development site as being an issue in terms of GCN, and DF clarified that the road would be designed to be permeable to GCN where it crosses the 'ecological corridor' in the vicinity of the existing balancing ponds (despite GCN not being recorded in these waterbodies). JS stated that the location of the school site was seen as potentially more problematic than the road.

6. DF then tabled the realigned school layout (option A2), and JS saw this as a much better option than the previous layout and from the point of view of retaining the green corridor function.

7. JS queried whether the E6A land to the south of the site was in the control of the developer, although DF stated that it was not. JS wondered whether it was possible to check who this land is owned by, whether it includes just the two fields to the southwest of the site or includes the two fields to the east of this as well. JS was also keen to look into whether it could be brought into the development or enhanced through the local plan (via financial contribution from the developers), e.g. to create new ponds (e.g. lily ponds similar to those within the adjacent water gardens). However, JS confirmed that they acknowledged they would not wish the developers to be open to ransom for this land.

8. Within the development site itself (i.e. land definitely within the developers control), JS would be looking for enhancements for GCN such as the creation of new ponds linked through the site by areas of rough grassland to allow GCN dispersal, and DF indicated that there are a series of balancing ponds proposed along the eastern boundary of the development site, within the 'Linear Park and Wildlife Corridor'. JS also suggested that the new school could be landscaped to benefit GCN and could include a pond.

9. JS went on to suggest that the management of the green spaces within the development site could be through the Amphibian and Reptiles Conservation Trust or managers at Radipole Lake (although he felt it was unlikely the Wildlife Trust would be interested unless the E6A land could be included too), otherwise the Weymouth or East Dorset Parks Departments may be interested in taking over management of the land. DF confirmed that the detail of who would manage the open space areas would be discussed at the detailed stage, and in many cases an external management company takes over the maintenance of such land if the previous options do not pan out.

10. JS also stated that NE would be looking for a Biodiversity Mitigation Plan form to be filled out and submitted as an appendix to any application, as this sets

out clearly and in simple terms the specific mitigation proposed, which can then be easily conditioned.

11. JS suggested that the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) is contacted for background records on protected and notable species recorded in the area, and DF confirmed that DERC have already been contacted and results received. JS said that if Barn Owl have been recorded in the area, he would like to see the inclusion of a Barn Owl box within the scheme.

12. Finally, JS requested that if there are any areas of grassland within the site that have some botanical interest, they would need to look at compensation costs involved and how much land (not necessarily within the site boundary) would be needed to offset this loss, and therefore NE should be contacted to discuss this further, if it cannot be achieved on site. However, both DF and JM confirmed that the site generally comprises improved grassland fields, dominated by Perennial Rye-grass, and has little botanical interest. Further, it was agreed by JS and DF that should any compensation land be required for the loss of any areas of higher botanical interest, given the areas of open green space within the development site, it should be possible to provide any such compensation on-site.

Conclusions

13. JS stated that, given the alteration to the school layout, and the inclusion of enhancements to the green corridor within the site (as well as through exploring the possibility of inclusion the E6A land within these enhancements), he envisions NE would be unlikely to object to the proposed development and sees it has the potential to be held up as a ‘good example of sustainable development’ if designed correctly.