

Planning Application Response

Ecology

To: Mary Hudson

From: Laura Grant, Ecology Officer, Oxfordshire County Council

Site: White Cross Farm, Cholsey

Detail: Extraction and processing of sand and gravel including the construction of new site access roads, landscaping and screening bunds, minerals washing plant and other associated infrastructure with restoration to agriculture and nature conservation areas, using inert fill

Application number: MW.0115/21

Date sent: 20 October 2021

Comments

Further to comments made in response to the application in June 2018, updated ecological assessment of the site has been carried out by Windrush Ecology. The original assessment was undertaken in 2016 by Pleydell Smithyman and was considered out of date. I have reviewed the updated survey report and can confirm I am satisfied with the scope of surveys.

Overall the surveys confirm that the majority of the site remains unchanged, however extent and condition of some habitats, including grassland has reduced in extent and quality due to agricultural impacts. An area of marshy grassland has reduced in size due to conversion to arable and semi-improved grassland has in part been sprayed with herbicides.

A few points will require further clarification before I can complete my response:

- 1) There is a potential rare Black Poplar tree present on site (requiring DNA analysis), however it isn't clear whether this is being retained. The tree was not found to offer potential to support roosting bats, however evidence of use by Red Kite and Buzzard has been found (arboricultural report). Given the species and age this tree should be retained for its ecological and arboricultural value. Clarification is therefore required.
- 2) The Ecology report does not confirm whether there is presence or likely absence of invasive species within the site. Clarification on the status of such species is therefore required e.g. can it be confirmed whether Photograph 14 is New Zealand Pygmyweed.
- 3) There seems to be some discrepancy between the area values and habitat types detailed in Appendix 6 Biodiversity Metric and those within Section 2.1 of the Restoration Strategy produced by Kedd Limited (e.g. the site area, deciduous woodland creation, reedbeds and various others). It looks as though the plans may have been changed slightly in September 2021? Can Windrush see whether any revisions are needed to the metric and provide us with a proposed habitat plan with the habitat types labelled as per the biodiversity metric?

At present it is unclear which areas are retained, enhanced or new habitats of a given type are being created (e.g. what does enhanced amenity experience relate to habitat wise?).