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RE: Further information regarding Dormice for DM/25/0445 Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

This letter serves to collate information regarding Dormice provided as part of the outline application DM/25/0445 Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex for the construction of up to 80 dwellings with associated landscaping, open space, infrastructure and vehicular and pedestrian accesses.

This document addresses concerns specifically related to Dormouse mitigation, evaluation and the recommendations provided within the EclA Report (Ecosupport, 2025). The following information has been provided to clarify, contextualize, and, where applicable, address the general issues raised regarding the potential ecological impacts to Dormice, arising from the proposed development.

The information within this document largely replicates the information provided within the original reports. At this stage the planning application is under consideration, with no objections regarding Dormice having been raised by the Mid Sussex District Councils appointed ecology consultant.

Survey Results & Site Evaluation

During the Dormouse survey undertaken on site between April-October 2024 two Dormouse nests were recorded within the western tree line, in addition to one torpid Dormouse found at the north of the western hedgerow. As the habitats on site, and linear features between each parcel, are connected presence is highly likely to have been established within all areas of suitable habitat on site as well as within all connecting suitable habitat in the local area. All suitable habitats on site are therefore considered to support Dormice.

Due to the presence of nests, it is considered likely there is a breeding population on-site. Using the valuation criteria outlined within CIEEMs *Guidelines of Ecological Impact Assessment in the United Kingdom* (2018) the site can be considered to be of **County Value** for Dormice, although there is a significant amount of alternative suitable habitat within the immediate local area.

Figure 1. The Dormouse tube locations during the 2024 Dormouse surveys. The location of the dormouse is highlighted in orange and the dormice nests in blue.



Recommendations

As the presence of Dormice has been confirmed on site, all vegetation removal works will require a European Protected Species Licence (EPSL). Vegetation clearance must not commence until the EPSL has been obtained from Natural England. All activities will adhere to the conditions and requirements outlined within the licence.

European Protected Species Licence

The proposed plans will require removal of sections of hedgerow / mature trees and bramble scrub on-site. These habitats may contain Dormice, as Dormouse nests were found and all of these habitats are contiguous with the habitat to be directly impacted upon. Therefore, Dormice should be assumed to be present within all areas of the site. A European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) will be required for any works impacting the hedgerows / mature trees and bramble scrub and such works must be carried out under the EPSL.

Vegetation Clearance

As the proposals are at outline stage, the specific area of Dormouse habitat to be cleared is not known. However any clearance of suitable Dormouse habitat will take place under a single stage / two stage methodology. Any Dormice discovered during the works will be either be left undisturbed in place (if deemed safe by the ecologist) or will be relocated to a similar location to where they were found in retained habitat (e.g. if the animal is found within leaf litter, then the animal will be placed in leaf litter). Prior to the removal of the vegetation (to include Bramble scrub) on site, the retained trees / woodland along the western boundary of the site will have a total of 6 wooden nest boxes erected (**Fig 2**). These will act as receptors for any active Dormice found during the sensitive clearance works (outlined below) and will be located within 100 m of all cleared vegetation by the licenced ecologist.

Figure 2. Indicative locations of the 6 No. Dormouse boxes on site (yellow circles).



Clearance Methodology

The following methodologies outline both a single stage option and two stage option for the clearance work to be carried out once a Natural England EPSL has been granted.

Single stage:

- Fingertip search of all vegetation to be cleared, by the licenced ecologist, immediately prior to clearance commencing (on the same day and every day clearance occurs).
- Prior to works commencing, the named ecologist or accredited agent will provide all site operatives with a toolbox talk to inform them of the potential presence of Dormice, their legal status, means of identification, habitat requirements, the methodologies required to avoid impacts on the species and what they should do if a dormouse is found. A written record that this has been undertaken, signed by attendees, will be kept and made available to Natural England should it be required.
- Hand tools will be utilised to sensitively cut vegetation down to ground level in **a single stage**. This will be undertaken in a directional fashion to passively encourage Dormice to move away from the works area towards retained, suitable hedgerow / treeline habitat. Where areas of scrub are being cut, this will be done directionally towards the retained habitats. All arisings will be chipped on site immediately.
- Cut material will be removed from the areas and chipped and removed from site or area of working operations.
- 6 Dormouse nest boxes will be placed into the areas of retained hedgerow / treeline around the site to act as receptors in the event of any Dormice being found (**Fig 2**).
- Works will take place outside of the core breeding periods (June - September inclusive) and avoid the hibernation period (late November – March) and as such, the most appropriate timings would be April - May and late September - October
- **No more than 50m² of habitat will be cleared in a single day**

Two Stage methodology

Clearance of the vegetation within the site will be carried out sympathetically and under the supervision of a Licenced Ecologist (LE) who will search for nests by hand and capture Dormice (if necessary) before and during clearance works. If any active animals are discovered during the works then these animals will be captured and placed, with their original nest where present, within previously erected nest boxes (outlined above). If any hibernation nests/potential hibernation nests are identified during the first stage of the clearance over winter, these will be left undisturbed, with vegetation retained in a buffer around the nest, due to the vulnerable nature of hibernating or torpid Dormice. All arisings / cuttings will also be removed from site each day following a hand search by the licenced ecologist to prevent re-occupation.

- The licenced ecologist will deliver a toolbox talk to the vegetation clearance contractors, detailing the sensitive measures required. The ecologist will then supervise all vegetation clearance. No clearance will be undertaken without the supervision of the ecologist.
- To avoid any impacts to Dormice the removal of all vegetation will adopt a two staged approach with the upper sections removed over winter (when Dormice may be hibernating in the lower parts) and the trunk and roots removed during spring.

Winter clearance

This should remove sufficient vegetation to persuade Dormice emerging from hibernation in April or May to move to more appropriate habitat nearby. Once emergence is complete, by the end of May, full clearance of the area can continue. Winter clearance should thus be planned as a two- stage process.

Trees and shrubs within the area in question should be cut down between November and March inclusive, to avoid both the bird nesting season and the majority of the period when Dormice might be found in nests above ground. Clearance should be done by hand and in a sensitive manner, to minimise the likelihood of disturbing or killing hibernating Dormice. Similarly, the process of removing the cut material should, as far as possible, be designed to protect Dormice hibernating on the ground. This can involve such techniques as:

- Sacrificing a single ‘haul- route’, which has first been cleared by hand if necessary;
- Using a long-reach mechanical grab and/or limiting the number of ‘drag-lines’ along which stems are removed; and/or
- Directional felling to minimise the ground impact.

In addition to the above, all vegetation being removed, and the ground beneath, will first be hand searched as far as possible to identify the presence of any hibernation nests. Similarly, any proposed drag/haul routes will first be searched by hand before such usage commences. If any hibernation nests are identified, these will be retained and protected and, if present within a haul/drag routes these will be re-routed to avoid the retained nest.

Spring clearance

Once the above works have been completed, the roots will be removed using hand tools where possible or with a digger using a toothed bucket under the supervision of the licenced ecologist from mid-April onwards (provided the temperatures have been warm enough for Dormice to emerge from hibernation at the discretion of the ecologist).

Minimising Disturbance

Prior to construction works commencing the retained tree lines and hedgerows will be protected from damage during the works. They will be fenced using Heras fencing or similar to prevent access by machinery. Where large mature trees are present, they will be protected using standard arboricultural tree protection measures which include protection of the canopy and prevention of root compaction. Access will not be permitted behind this fencing by construction personnel. This will protect Dormouse habitat from direct damage/disturbance and dust. Signage will also be added (on top of the usual warnings for tree protective fencing) stating things such as:

“Protected Dormouse Habitat

It is an Offence to Damage / Disturb this Habitat”

This will also provide protection for wildlife species, including Badgers, that may be using the margins of the site as well as bats, invertebrates, reptiles and other mammals. No vehicles will enter the protective ring fencing and no materials will be stored within their circumference. All protective fencing must be in place prior to any construction machinery arriving on site, before any works on site get underway, and will remain in place until all work is completed. This will minimise the level of disturbance within the boundary habitat / buffer areas during the works and ensure the habitats and any wildlife species that may be using them are protected.

Habitat Compensation / Connectivity

Habitat compensation will be achieved through the provision of a new native tree planting or scrub of equivalent area or more to provide a greater level of connectivity. Species that should be considered within the hedgerow and compensational planting area will include Hazel, Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Pedunculate Oak, Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and climbers such as Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*) and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*).

In addition, a planted trellis will be installed over the two cycle paths running through the tree lines to prevent fragmentation of Dormouse habitat.

Dormouse Boxes

As iterated in the above sections, prior to the commencement of vegetation removal, at least 6 No Dormouse boxes will be installed by a suitably qualified ecologist in suitable habitat to be retained to enhance the site for Dormice (as per **Fig 2**). The boxes will be checked at years 1 – 10 post clearance works by a licenced ecologist and the data submitted to the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP).

Conclusion

Dormouse surveys were undertaken at Land North of Colwell Farm, Haywards Heath between April-October 2024 as part of the outline planning application (DM/25/0445). Two Dormouse nests were recorded on site, in addition to one torpid Dormouse found at the north of the western hedgerow. As the habitats on site, and linear features, support connectivity, it is assumed that Dormice are present within all areas of suitable habitat on site in addition to within all connecting suitable habitat in the local area. As such, any works which will impact Dormice and/or Dormouse habitat must be undertaken under a European Protected Species License (EPSL). All vegetation to be removed will be replaced with habitat of equivalent area or more to provide a greater level of connectivity.

In addition to securing an EPS License, additional mitigation and compensation measures are proposed to further reduce potential impacts on Dormice. These initiatives include habitat creation and the installation of linking structures to enhance foraging resources and maintain habitat connectivity. To help increase the site's capacity to support Dormice, the provision of six Dormouse boxes within retained woodland and along linear features is recommended. Furthermore, planting of native trees and scrub, particularly fruiting species, will be undertaken to provide additional food sources for Dormice.

As noted above, the planning application remains under consideration, and to date, no objections have been raised by the Local Planning Authority. In addition, Place Services (on behalf of Mid Sussex District Council) currently supports the mitigation measures set out in Section 6.6.2 of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Ecosupport, 2025). With the implementation of the above measures, the impacts to Dormice will be appropriately mitigated and the overall carrying capacity will be increased for this species.

References

Ecosupport Ltd (July 2025). *Land at North Colwell Farm – Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)*

Natural England, 2011 *Badgers and Development: A Guide to Best Practice and Licensing*

UK Hab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification System Version 2.0* (at <https://www.ukhab.org>).