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9th April 2025

RE: Ecology Comments for DM/25/0445 Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

This letter serves to provide additional information in response to the ecology consultee comments from Place Services on behalf of Mid Sussex District Council dated 21st March 2025.

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Bats

'It is not clear from Section 6.2.1 of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Ecosupport Ltd., January 2025) whether any additional trees other than those already assessed are to be removed. Therefore we request clarification as to which trees will be removed and highlight that Ground level Tree Assessment for roosting bats needs to be undertaken in accordance with the 4th Ed. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Bat Conservation Trust (Collins ed., 2023)) and the results submitted to the LPA prior to determination. This is in accordance with Government Standing Advice.'

At this stage all trees proposed for removal have been subject to a full, detailed Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) (referred to as a PRA within the report). No additional tree removal is required beyond what has been previously identified on the northeast of the site (**Fig 1**).

As stated within the EcIA Report (Jan, 2025), four trees were identified to support potential for roosting bats. The trees were located within the treeline adjacent to the proposed access location, to the northwest of the site. The location of these trees is displayed in the appended UK Habs Map and in **Fig 1** below.

Figure 1. The locations of the trees on the NW of the site which were identified as PRF-I for roosting bats



Species included 2x Sycamore, 1x Ash and 1x Oak. Features recorded include split limbs, peeling bark and superficial damage with only external PRFs identified. The trees were also immature with smaller DBHs (less than 20cm) recorded. The trees were all therefore classified as **PRF-I** as per the BCT Best Practice Guidelines (Collins, 2023). These trees are to be removed under current proposals.

Further information on the GLTA results can be found within the EcIA (Jan, 2025).

Precautionary Tree Removal

Prior to removal, the PRF's present within the trees on the northwest of site must be checked with an endoscope, and by a qualified ecologist, immediately prior to the trees being removed, to ensure no bats are present within them. When all features have been fully inspected and no evidence of bats is identified, the tree must be immediately felled. If any features cannot be fully inspected, the tree must be soft-felled. If evidence of bats is identified or if any PRF-Ms are found, further survey work will be required. In particular, if bats are found to be present, roost characterisation surveys will be carried out to inform a European Protected Species Licence and a full mitigation strategy will be required.

Reptiles

'In addition, the seven reptile surveys in April and May 2024 concluded that there are low populations of Slow Worm, Common Lizard and Grass Snake on site and therefore off-site habitat will need to be provided for reptile translocation (Ecological Impact Assessment (Ecosupport Ltd., January 2025). We generally support the Reptile Mitigation Strategy in Section 6.4, but we highlight that as a translocation receptor site has not yet been identified.'

Reptile Receptor

Receptor Location

Although the location of the receptor area was not specified within the EclA (January, 2025), translocated reptiles will be retained on site within an area which will be temporarily excluded with fencing to prevent reptiles entering the construction area. The area allocated for reptiles will be on the eastern parcel, from the south of the field to the northeast corner (**Fig 2**). This area is 1.117ha, and grassland present will be left to grow and not cut by the landowner prior to the reptile translocation to allow further development of tussocks within this area. The location along the south of the site also maintains connectivity to the watercourses that run along the south of the site. Considering the low number of reptiles recorded on site (max counts - Common Lizard = 5; Grass Snake = 1; Slow Worm = 6) this area is considered suitable to sufficient to support the reptiles on site. Upon the completion of works, the exclusion fencing will be removed and the reptiles will be able to disperse into the wider site. As part of the proposals the boundaries of the site will support species-rich grassland and there will also be a SUDs feature added to the southeast of the site to provide suitable habitat for reptiles on site.

Figure 2. The location of the reptile receptor area on site (1.117ha).



Receptor Enhancement

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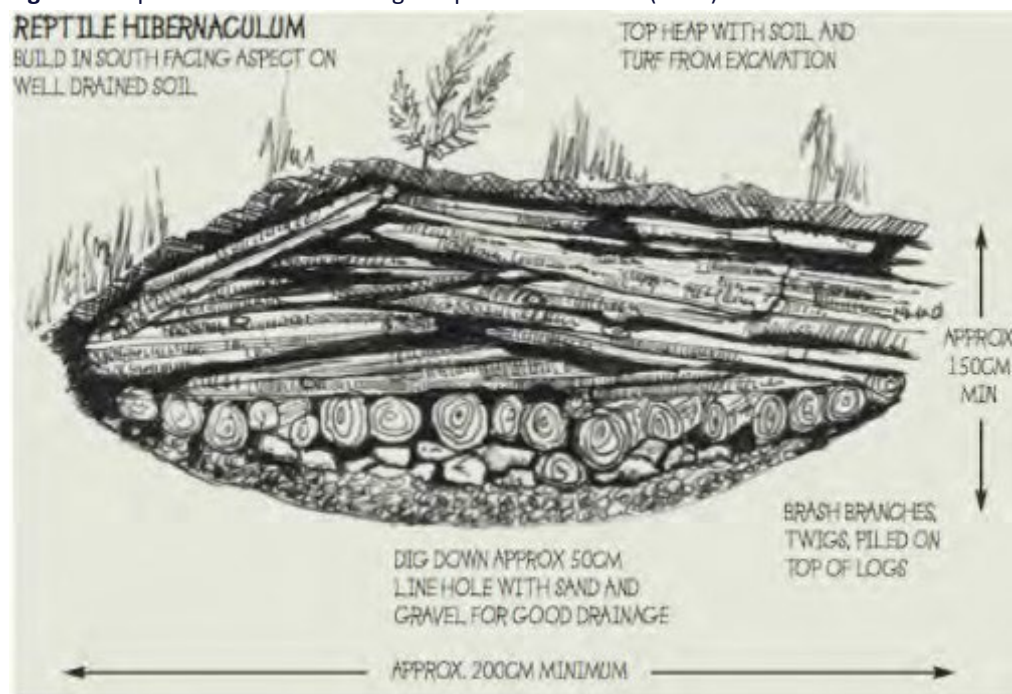
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To further improve the habitat and carrying capacity, the receptor area will be allowed to continue to grow prior to the translocation of reptiles to provide additional cover. Additionally, 2 new hibernacula will be created and retained in perpetuity following the specification outlined within Reptile Habitat Management: Guidelines for Landowners (HART, 2009) (**Fig 3**). This will provide shelter and hibernation opportunities as well as providing a significant habitat resource for invertebrates (a food resource for reptiles).

Figure 3. Reptile hibernaculum design as provided in HART (2009).



Habitat Management

Post Development Management / Protection of Receptor

The grassland within the receptor site will be left to grow for much of the year and will be cut once a year during early September to prevent the encroachment of scrub from the boundaries. This will be done to a height of 30cm to ensure that no reptiles are harmed during the management works and to enable the vegetation at ground level to establish dense tussocks. This will further improve the habitats on site for reptiles.

Given the future use of the receptor site as part of the ecological area, the area will be safeguarded from future development. The receptor is currently under the ownership of the landowners and can be subject to additional enhancement, management and protection measures as necessary and secured by a suitably worded condition or planning obligation. This will provide long term protection of the receptor area until the completion of works, where habitat management will be the responsibility of an external habitat management company.

Five Year Management Plan (Reptile Receptor Post Development Management and Landscaping)

Once the reptiles have been relocated into the defined receptor site, management works will need to be undertaken to ensure the area is maintained as a favourable habitat. This will be undertaken for the next five years and will be achieved through adopting the following prescriptions:

- Grassland cut to a depth of no less than 300mm (this should be done on rotation in different areas year to year. The relatively early cut will help to reduce vigour of the sward, allowing flowering species to persist)
- Cuts to take place twice yearly in late July and again in October
- Arisings from the cut will be left for a few days for seed to fall before being removed from site and composted. Location to be agreed with client and ecologist if kept on site.
- The proposed cutting regime is likely to be sufficient to control invasive broad-leaved species. However, if undesirable species such as invasive Canadian Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), Thistles (*Cirsium* spp.) and Docks (*Rumex* spp.) reach more than approximately 5% cover then they should be spot treated with a non-residual herbicide.
- During each management visits, any rubbish and tipped garden waste (from residents) will be removed.
- Wildflower meadows and other planted areas must be kept clean and weed/ rubbish free.
- Avoid plug plants and bulbs.
- The existing pond edge is to be retained and enhanced.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

“As a result, we have reviewed the BNG Assessment and HMMP (Ecosupport, January 2025) and Statutory Biodiversity Metric and are not satisfied that appropriate information has been provided prior to determination. This is because of the reasons set out below:

- *The following habitats are shown in Appendix 1 – Baseline Habitats Map of the BNG Assessment and HMMP (Ecosupport, January 2025), but have not been included in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric and there are no habitat condition assessments:*
 - *Lowland mixed deciduous woodland*
 - *A ditch is shown in Figure 4 as ‘one of the ditches present on site’ and the locations of two ditches are shown on the Baseline Habitats Map.*
 - *Bracken’ cover on the boundaries of the site (Section 3.4.2 of the Ecological Impact Assessment (Ecosupport Ltd., January 2025) and the report also refers to the removal of bramble scrub in Section 6.6.1.”*

Baseline Habitats

Within the BNG & HMMP Report (January 2025) & Statutory Biodiversity Metric (January, 2025), the following baseline habitats were recorded on site:

Table 1. Existing habitats present on site including details as to their condition and the condition assessment criteria that have been met / failed as per the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 1 (Defra, 2023b, updated 2024) (adapted from BNG & HMMP Report, January, 2025).

Habitat Type	Area (ha)	Condition	Condition Assessment Notes
Other neutral grassland	4.655	Poor	The other neutral grassland present on site is heavily grazed by deer therefore supports a short sward across the habitat. Typical species were present (Cock’s Foot, Yorkshire Fog, Annual Meadow Grass, Meadow Buttercup, Bird’s-foot Trefoil, Cinquefoil Germander Speedwell) indicative of this habitat type. There was also scattered bramble scrub and bracken present. The ground had been damaged by access in some areas leading to bare ground being present. Passes 2 of 6 criteria (A, E).
Lowland Mixed deciduous woodland	1.438	Good	The Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland present around the boundaries of the site comprised of a number of mature tree species (Oak, Sycamore, Ash, Silver Birch and Willow). A number of the trees have browsing damage caused by deer. The woodland also has open space, deadwood and a variety of tree ages classes present. Passes 33 out of the possible 39 (A3,B1,C3,D3,E3,F3,G3,H2,I1,J3,K3,L2,M3)

Vegetated Garden	0.069	Condition Assessment N/A	Condition Assessment N/A
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Table 1. Existing linear habitats present on site including details as to their condition and the condition assessment criteria that have been met / failed as per the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 1 (Defra, 2023b, updated 2024) (adapted from BNG & HMMP Report, January, 2025).

Habitat Type	Length (km)	Condition	Condition Assessment Notes	Strategic Significance
Line of trees	0.076	Moderate	Line of native trees comprising of Oak, Sycamore, Ash, Silver Birch and Willow with a complete canopy, but presence of browsing damage caused by deer. Passed 3 of 5 Criteria (A, B, E)	Area not in local strategy.

Ditches

It should be considered that the ditch along the eastern boundary is within the ancient woodland and not within the redline boundary of the site. Multiple site visits confirmed that the ditch between the west and central grassland parcels was dry and lacks vegetation, suggesting it seldom supports water. Consequently, the ditch was not subject to a condition assessment since it does not meet the criteria for classification as a ditch under the BNG methodology. For clarity, the location of the ditch has been amended on the baseline habitats map.

Bracken & Scrub

Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) patches were observed along the boundaries of each grassland parcel, adjacent to the bordering woodland. These areas supported only bracken, with no other vegetation present. Additionally, scattered bramble scrub (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.) was also present around the site’s edges, as shown on the baseline habitats map.

For the purposes of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculations, areas of bracken and bramble scrub were included within the broader neutral grassland habitat classification. This is reflected in the metric, where each neutral grassland parcel fails to meet Criterion D: "Cover of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) is less than 20%, and cover of scrub (including bramble, *Rubus fruticosus* agg.) is less than 5%."

However, it was considered important to identify the presence of bracken and scrub on the baseline habitats map, as these features were consistently present across all parcels and clearly visible in aerial imagery.

Please refer to the updated Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Ecosupport, April 2025) and updated BNG & HMMP Report (Ecosupport, April 2025) for detailed condition assessments and habitat information.

Kind regards,

Lewis Lakudzala MRes, ACIEEM

Project Ecologist

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References

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

Ecosupport Ltd (January, 2025). *Land at North Colwell Farm – BNG Assessment & HMMP Report.*

Ecosupport Ltd (April, 2025). *Land at North Colwell Farm – BNG Assessment & HMMP Report.*

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

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