

# Sandleford Park, Newbury

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF DAVID WEST MENV SCI (HONS) CENV  
MCIEEM ON ECOLOGY MATTERS - SUMMARY

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APP/15

Bloor Homes & The Sandleford Farm Partnership

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Prepared on Behalf of Tetra Tech Limited. Registered in England  
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## 1.0 SUMMARY

### 1.1 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- 1.1.1 My name is David West. I am an Associate Ecologist at the multi-disciplinary consultancy Tetra Tech, based in the Southampton office. I am a Chartered Environmentalist, hold a Master's degree in Environmental Science from the University of Southampton and am a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.
- 1.1.2 I have over 12 years' professional experience in ecological consultancy and have been employed by Tetra Tech since 2015. My professional experience is wide-ranging, including Ecological Appraisals, Phase 1 Habitat Surveys and field surveys for protected species including bats, birds, hazel dormice and herpetiles. I hold Natural England survey licences for bats (Class 2), great crested newts (Class 1) and hazel dormice (Class 1) and have acted as named ecologist for European Protected Species Mitigation licences for bats and hazel dormice and Badger Mitigation licences. I have also developed numerous mitigation strategies and have written Ecological Impact Assessments (forming Ecology chapters for Environmental Statements) and Habitats Regulations Assessments.
- 1.1.3 My experience covers a range of sectors including renewable energy, highways, commercial development, defence and residential development.

### 1.2 PLANNING HISTORY

- 1.2.1 The Statement of Case and evidence from Mr Jones sets out the planning history for the appeal site. Of particular relevance to my evidence is Application 18/00764/OUTMAJ. As Mr Jones explains, the appeal scheme is a resubmission of 18/00764/OUTMAJ incorporating additional information to address comments which was not formally accepted by the LPA.
- 1.2.2 The Ecological aspects of the scheme were reviewed on behalf of the LPA by BSG Ecology who concluded there should be no outright objection to the application on Ecology grounds, and any uncertainties (primarily in relation to hydrology and ancient woodland) could be addressed through detailed design and management prescriptions. There has been no significant change in policy or legislation since this consultation, nor has there been any change in the value of ecological features on site, or their conservation status.
- 1.2.3 In accordance with Policy CS17 the Country Park provides opportunities to deliver gains for target habitats and species in relation to the Biodiversity Opportunity Area (although a biodiversity impact assessment metric was not completed). The BSG Ecology response confirms that a metric is not required by policy, however this was later provided demonstrating a net gain for biodiversity.

### 1.3 THE SPD

- 1.3.1 The Sandleford Park Supplementary Planning Document (2015) includes two development principles of relevance to ecology.

1.3.2 E1 states “The site will actively manage and promote ecology and biodiversity within the site.” The appeal scheme meets this principle as demonstrated by the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment which shows a net gain in biodiversity (an outcome which is accepted by the Council). The scheme includes key aspects providing opportunities for enhancement identified in the SPD including management of woodland and new woodland planting; management and enhancement of watercourses; new public open spaces, management and enhancement of new and existing hedgerows and trees; and management and enhancement of existing and creation of new ponds.

1.3.3 E2 states “Management and protection of ecology through the development process.” The appeal scheme meets this principle by retaining key habitat features with proposals for maintenance and protection within the EMMP (Appendix F18). In 2018, BSG Ecology concurred that retention of designated sites and protection for protected and rare species was appropriate to their status. E2 goes on to state that details will be provided at both outline and reserved matters stages. Therefore, the appellant’s position that detailed mitigation measures are a matter to be dealt with at the Reserved Matters stage is in accordance with development principle E2.

## **1.4 STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

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1.4.1 A number of matters in relation to Ecology are agreed in Section 12 of the Statement of Common Ground. These are:

1.4.2 The suite of the other ecological surveys undertaken by the then Applicants, now Appellants, and included in the Environmental Statement are appropriate for the purpose of the ecological impact assessment (the council consider that survey effort for badgers and bats is not sufficient).

1.4.3 The Council does not seek to pursue any matters relating to Woodpasture and Parkland BAP priority habitat.

1.4.4 The proposed Country Park will provide a destination for new and existing residents, helping to mitigate increased recreational pressure on other valued sites in the local area.

1.4.5 A detailed scheme for the management and maintenance of the Country Park and ancient woodlands can be secured by appropriate pre-commencement condition/s.

1.4.6 The proposed development achieves a biodiversity net gain (BNG). However the Council considers that this BNG assessment does not account for the degradation of retained existing habitats and their inhabiting species on site over time.

## **1.5 REASON FOR REFUSAL 8**

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1.5.1 The Council set out two reasons for refusal which are the subject of my Proof of Evidence. The first, No. 8, relates to Ancient Woodland, in particular the size of woodland buffers and avoidance of harm.

1.5.2 The appeal scheme provides woodland buffers in accordance with the SPD and statutory guidance, which are adequate to avoid significant harm to the woodlands. Furthermore, proposals are made to enhance the condition of the woodlands through habitat management. At the Reserved Matters stage, further detail of the woodland buffers and management would be submitted. This is consistent with the view of BSG Ecology who in 2018 stated that increased buffers, woodland

management, improving connectivity and public access management were matters of detailed design and not a reason for objection at the Outline stage.

## **1.6 REASON FOR REFUSAL 11**

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1.6.1 The Council set out two reasons for refusal which are the subject of my Proof of Evidence. The second, No. 11, relates to Ecology and Biodiversity, in particular the potential for deterioration of habitats, loss of suitability for notable species and biodiversity net gain.

1.6.2 My evidence addresses these points in detail. In summary, as detailed in the Ecology Chapter and the Net Gain Assessment, management and actions are proposed to enhance the condition of the woodland and other habitats on site. This assessment is based on current and predicted physical condition criteria and therefore takes into account potential future impacts from recreation. An updated Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been undertaken (Appendix B). This uses the latest Natural England 2.0 Biodiversity Metric which uses a greater number of these condition criteria. These criteria are then used to define the proposed management measures. This clearly sets out how the target condition will be achieved, regardless of recreational pressure, and the inclusion of a ranger to oversee the Country Park only increases the level of confidence.

1.6.3 As I set out in my evidence, I disagree with the Council's view that insufficient regard has been given to occupation phase effects, or that there will be significant effects on protected and notable species (taking into account mitigation). Further details of mitigation can appropriately be provided at Reserved Matters (as was agreed by BSG Ecology). Critically, the parties agree that the development will achieve a net gain for biodiversity.

1.6.4 I therefore consider that the appeal scheme is in accordance with the SPD (in particular Principles E1, E2 and L4), the NPPF and Policies CS3, CS14, CS17, CS18, CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Core Strategy, adopted July 2012).