Oakley Ecology

ADUR & WORTHING
PLANNING SERVICES

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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

At

Land at New Salts Farm Road

Shoreham By Sea

West Sussex

BN43 5FE

For

The Dogs Trust

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Executive summary

The Dogs Trust commissioned Oakley Ecology to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal of the Land at New Salts Farm Road in order to discharge condition 3 of an Adur District Council planning decision.

The proposed works include the creation of walking routes for dogs and an area of amenity grassland for additional overflow parking in summer months.

The site is approximately 36 acres in size and dominated by large areas of species poor semi-improved grassland, reedbed, scattered scrub and drains and ditches.

The mixture of habitats across the site provide suitable foraging, refuge and commuting habitat for a number of protected species including bats, common reptiles, water voles and nesting birds.

In order to protect and enhance the site for biodiversity it is recommended that dog walking trails and site management plans should be developed with the input of an ecologist.

The nature of the proposed development will not impact on any protected species, providing the suggested recommendations are incorporated within the development scheme. It is predicted that the ecological value of the site will improve following the proposed development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Survey Objectives

Oakley Ecology were commissioned in October 2014 by The Dogs Trust to conduct site surveys to determine the ecological value of 'lot 2'[1] of the land at New Salts Farm Road, Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex, BN43 5TL.
The survey requirement was identified through a planning decision by Adur District Council in order to discharge the following planning condition:

Condition 3.
'The use hereby permitted shall not commence until an ecological survey of the land has been carried out and the results submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

Should protected species be discovered, no mowing or disturbance of the land shall take place until details indicating how suitable provision will be made for the protected species and their habitats have been submitted to and approved in writing.'

The following activities were commissioned:

- To conduct an preliminary ecological assessment of the site;
- To provide sufficient information in order to satisfy the planning decision; and
- To offer appropriate management options to encourage biodiversity on the site.

1.2 Site description

The land at New Salts Farm Road (hereby referred to as 'the site') is located adjacent to existing Dogs Trust land along the Brighton Road (Grid ref. TQ207048).

[1] The Land at New Salts Farm Road - comprised of 107 acres of agricultural grassland and includes two separate lots, Lot 1 extends to 71 acres and includes grassland and farm buildings; Lot 2 is an area of 36 acres.

The site is predominately comprised of approximately 36 acres of grassland but also includes areas of scrub, hedgerows, reedbeds and drain and ditch habitat. The site in part has been managed historically by grazing and moving but is currently not managed and is overgrown in areas.

1.3 Proposed works

The proposed works include the management of walkways to provide additional exercise grounds for dogs as well as to provide additional parking for events at the Dogs Trust centre in the summer months.

In order to allow for additional parking on the site there is a requirement to extend an area of improved grassland by approximately 40m to the north west. This area of improved grassland is managed by mowing and is kept short for the majority of the year. See appendix 3 for the design of the dog walking routes and 40m extension of amenity grassland.

It is proposed that walkways will be maintained by mowing field boundaries at an appropriate time of year to allow for dogs to be exercised on the lead throughout the year.

2. Methods

2.1 Desk study

The MAGIC[2] website and the National Biodiversity Network[3] were consulted with regards to the presence of statutory and non-statutory sites and protected species within a 2km and a 1km radius respectively.

The Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan was consulted in order to identify local and regional priority species.

[2] MAGIC (http://www.magic.gov.uk/)
[3] National Biodiversity Network Gateway (https://data.nbn.org.uk/)

Only current records were considered, within the last ten years.

2.2 Preliminary ecological appraisal

On Monday 27th October 2014, Ryan Oakley, an Oakley Ecology senior ecologist conducted an adapted Phase 1 habitat survey using standard techniques and methodologies[4]. A Phase 1 habitat survey is a standard technique for rapidly obtaining baseline ecological information over a large area of land. This technique is primarily used for mapping vegetation present on a site however it also allows for the identification of habitats suitable for protected species.

Appendix 1 shows the survey plan and provides a guide to the habitats found across the site.

3. Results

3.1 Desk study

3.1.1 Statutory sites

There were three statutory sites within 2km of the site including Adur Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest which was within 100m of the eastern boundary of the site. Details of statutory sites are included in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Locations with statutory nature conservation designations within 5km of the site.

Site name	Designation	Distance from site	Direction from site
Adur Estuary	SSSI	100m	E

[4] Joint Nature Conservation Committee - Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey - a technique for environmental audit (2010).

Widewater Lagoon	LNR	390m	SW
Shoreham Beach	LNR	410M	SE

3.1.2 Non-statutory sites

No non-statutory sites were identified within 1km of the site.

3.1.3 Protected species

No protected species data available.

3.1.4 UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan lists species action plans for the following species:

- Water Vole
- Hare
- Otter
- Bats

The UK Biodiversity Action plan lists habitat action plans for the following habitats on or adjacent to the site:

- Hedgerows
- Streams
- Reedbeds

3.1.5 Local Biodiversity Action Plan

The Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Sussex lists priority species and habitats.

Species:

- Bats

- Dormice
- Great Crest Newt
- Short-snouted seahorse
- Slow Worm
- Common Toad

Habitats:

- Hedgerows
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Traditional Orchard
- Lowland meadows
- Arable field margins

3.2 Preliminary ecological appraisal[5]

During the survey the site was separated into distinct survey plots which were separated by field boundaries including stock fencing, species poor defunct hedgerows, ditches and drains. A plan of the site is located in Appendix 1. Each field was numbered from one to six from the northern field (field one) running south towards the fields west of the site (field six).

3.2.1 Habitats

Species poor semi-improved grassland

The entire site consists predominately of species poor semi-improved grassland dominated by cocksfoot, false oat grass and perennial rye grass with white clover, creeping thistle and groundsel. Areas of scattered scrub were present throughout these grassland areas which was dominated by bramble.

[5] Scientific names are provided in Appendix 2.

Fields three and four were predominantly dominated by annual meadow grass and cocksfoot and were the only field showing signs of recent management through grazing or mowing with the grassland sward lower than the other fields across the site.

Amenity grassland

Amenity grassland was present within field two which is currently part of the dog exercising fields associated with the Dogs Trust centre. This field is dominated by perennial rye grass and white clover.

Species poor defunct hedgerow

A species poor defunct hedgerow bounds the northern perimeter of the site and provides a buffer from the adjacent railway line. The hedgerow is dominated by hawthorn and blackthorn with common nettle and cow parsley also present within the hedgerow structure.

Drains and ditches

There are a network of ditches and drains that bisect the site from east to west in the north and in the middle of the site between fields two and three and four and five.

At the time of the survey the ditches north of the site were predominantly dry and were dominated by common reed.

The drain between fields two and three and fields four and five is approximately 3-6m wide with flowing water present with sloping banks dominated by common reed.

Scattered scrub

Scattered scrub was present throughout the site dominated by creeping thistle and bramble.

Field one had larger areas of scattered scrub dominated by bramble and tall ruderal species including common nettle and nipplewort.

Reedbed

Common reed is present within the majority of the ditches and drains across the site. This reedbed habitat is present on the banks and dominates field five which is lower than the other fields and is surrounded tightly by the drain on the south and a wet ditch on the north.

The reedbed habitat presents a corridor for the movement of wildlife across the site and provides connectivity to other reedbed within the landscape.

3.2.2 Protected Species

Badgers

No records of badger were recorded within 2km of the site. The network of habitats across the site provide suitable habitat for badgers however no signs were recorded during the survey.

Bats

No records were identified within 2km of the site however the site presents suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats. The hedgerow on the northern boundary will provide a suitable commuting corridor and the grassland across the site will provide suitable foraging habitat.

Nesting birds

The scattered scrub, species poor semi-improved grassland, reedbed and hedgerow habitats provide suitable nesting features for a number of birds including skylark, lapwing, reed warbler, bittern and common song birds.

Dormice

The hedgerow on the northern perimeter of the site presents some suitable habitat for hazel dormice however the hedgerows are not well connected to larger more suitable habitat. No signs of hazel dormice were recorded during the survey.

Great Crested Newt

There were no ponds identified within 500m of the site. Ditches and drains bisect the site and the site is dominated by species poor semi-improved grassland that could provide suitable terrestrial habitat.

Common Reptiles

The mixture of species poor semi-improved grassland, scattered scrub and hedgerows present suitable habitat for basking, foraging and hibernating reptiles. No evidence of common reptiles was identified at the time of the survey.

Kingfisher

The ditches and drains provide suitable foraging habitat for kingfishers however the banks are heavily dominated by common reed and provide no banks suitable for nesting kingfisher.

Water Vole

No signs of water vole were identified during the site survey. The banks and vegetation provide suitable foraging and refuge for water voles.

Otter

No signs of otters on the site were identified during the site survey. The drain and ditches could be used by otters travelling across the site.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Statutory sites

Three statutory sites were located within 2km of the site including the Adur Estuary SSSI. The Adur Estuary SSSI is designated for its diversity of saltmarsh habitat and intertidal mudflats.

Although the northern edge of the site is within 100m of the Adur Estuary SSSI due to the low impact of the proposed works and due to no built development or change of habitat across the site it is likely the proposed works will not pose any significant impact on the SSSI designation and will not effect the SSSIs favourable condition.

4.2 Protected species

Badgers

Although no signs of badgers using the site were identified during the site visit as badgers are very mobile they could start utilising the habitats across the site at anytime.

Bats

There will be no increase built development across the site and no additional lighting proposed across the site. The development will have no significant impact on the local population of bats and will seek to improve the habitat for foraging and commuting bats.

Nesting birds

It is very possible that nesting birds will be present across the site during the months of March and August inclusive. The proposed works should seek to avoid habitat suitable for nesting birds were possible.

Great Crested Newts

The ditches and drains on site were either flowing or dry and present suboptimal habitat and there is a lack of suitable terrestrial habitat to ponds within 2km of the site. The site is bounded on the north by the railway line which is a significant barrier to the movement of great crested newts as well as the Adur Estuary on the east of the site.

Common reptiles

The habitats across the site are suitable for common lizard, grass snake and slow worm. The proposed work should seek to avoid times when reptiles are likely to be hibernating on the site (November to March inclusive).

Water vole

The habitats across the site are suitable for foraging water voles and will provide suitable refuge. Works should avoid areas close to these water habitats.

Otter

The ditches and drains across the site provide suitable refuge and foraging for otters moving across the site. The works should seek to avoid these water habitats to reduce the potential of disturbing the movement of wildlife within the ditches and drain corridor.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Habitats

Species poor semi-improved grassland

There are a number of ways of improving the species poor semi-improved grassland. Recommendations for enhancements are listed in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Grassland improvement techniques.

Management type	Technique	Timing	Management regime	Management option?
Pasture	Grazing by sheep or cattle	Light grazing in spring and summer	Rotation of grazing throughout the site	No - Grazing not an option with dogs present
Hay meadow	Cutting of grassland swards	Hay cutting in late July.	Annual cutting on field rotation. 1-2 fields cut each year..	Yes - Management can be achieved without grazing.

Hedgerows

It is unlikely that the proposed works will affect the hedgerows on site. Additional planting on the northern boundary would improve the species diversity within the hedgerow. Native species only should be planted and should only include locally found species.

Additional hedgerow planting along the stock fencing between field 6 and 2 would benefit the site.

Drains and ditches

It is likely that the drains and ditches will not be affected by the proposed works. It is recommended however that dogs are not encouraged within 8m of the bank of the drains and ditches and should not be able to reach the waters edge. This will ensure that the bank habitat is not disturbed.

See appendix 4 - the revised walkways following consultation with ecologist.

Reedbeds

In order to protect the reedbeds across the site a minimum 8m buffer zone should be maintained between any reedbed habitat and dog walking trails.

The largest amount of reedbed habitat is present surrounding field five and as such walkways should avoid access to this field where possible. The health of the reedbed should be monitored, if required management techniques such as 7-10 year cutting rotation could be introduced to encourage enhancement.

See Appendix 4.

5.2 Protected species

Common reptiles

It is important to protect and enhance the habitat across the site for common reptiles such as common lizard, slow worm and grass snake.

The majority of hibernation habitat is present within the field boundaries and within areas of scattered scrub. The management of walkways should avoid cutting within the hibernation period between November and March inclusive. Any cuttings made from the creation of the walkways should be collected and left in piles in various places across the site to provide additional refuge and egg laying habitat.

It is recommended that walkways are designed with the aid of an ecologist in order to provide advice on suitable habitat enhancement and to help avoid potentially sensitive habitats.

Nesting birds

Vegetation clearance should ideally avoid the main bird nesting period (March to August inclusive) however if this is not possible it is recommended that a nest bird survey is conducted prior to works commencing. This survey will identify areas of the site utilised by nesting birds and provide recommendations to avoid these sensitive areas through the works.

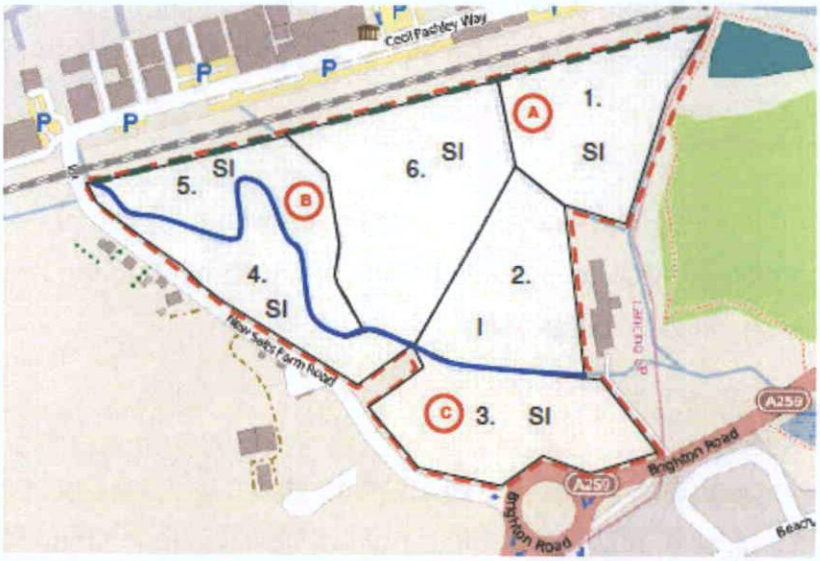
Reedbed habitat should be avoided through the implementation of the dog walking trails and where possible a 8m buffer zone should be maintained throughout the site. See appendix 4.

Water voles

If any works are to take place within 5m of the ditch or drains across the site it is recommended that a water vole survey is completed prior to works commencing. Water voles are most active between March and November inclusive, any surveys outside of these months may not represent the true extent of water vole use across the site.

Appendix 1 - Habitat survey map

The Land at New Salts Farm Road - Habitat survey plan



Legend		Target note	
1.	Field number	A	Large areas of scattered scrub
SI	Species poor semi-improved grassland	B	Extended reedbed habitat within field 5.
	Species poor defunct hedgerow	C	South facing mound within field 3. Suitable reptile basking habitat.
	Drain / Ditch with associated reedbed		
	Lot 2 boundary		
I	Improved grassland		

Base map provided by "© OpenStreetMap contributions"

Appendix 2 - Scientific names

Vegetation	
Common nettle	*Urtica dioica*
Cow parsley	*Anthriscus sylvestris*
Cocksfoot	*Dactylis glomerata*
Perennial rye grass	*Lolium perenne*
False oat grass	*Arrhenatherum elatius*
White clover	*Trifolium repens*
Creeping thistle	*Cirsium arvense*
Groundsel	*Senecio vulgaris*
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosa*
Annual meadow grass	*Annua poa*
Hawthorn	*Crataegus monogyna*
Blackthorn	*Prunus spinosa*
Nipplewort	*Lapsana communis*
Common reed	*Phragmites australis*
Animals	
Water vole	*Arvicola amphibius*
Hare	*Lepus europaeus*
Otter	*Lutra lutra*
Great Crest Newt	*Triturus cristatus*
Hazel dormouse	*Muscardinus avellanarius*
Slow worm	*Anguis fragilis*
Common lizard	*Lacerta zootoca*
Grass snake	*Natrix natrix*
Common toad	*Bufo bufo*
Badger	*Meles meles*
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*
Reed warbler	*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
Bittern	*Botaurus stellaris*
Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*

Appendix 3 - Original landscape plan to reduce walkways

Appendix 4 - Revised plan of walkways following ecologist consultation

Oakley Ecology 09/12/2014